

CIVIC MASS HOMILY 20 NOVEMBER 2022

I rejoiced when I heard them say: 'Let us go to God's house'.

Just a week ago many of us were in Colmore Row, with the Lord Mayor and Bishop Anne Hollinghurst, at the Remembrance Sunday Service and Parade, commemorating all those who had died through warfare and violence. It was a poignant national and civic moment of remembering and thanksgiving – a moment that brought us together again.

November is the month for remembering, as autumn turns to winter and the year draws towards its close – and there has been much to remember over the course of the last year, as well as those events and developments that we wish we could forget but which are now written into the long story of our common humanity.

We need to recall the joyful days of the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee with its overwhelming note of thanksgiving for her extraordinary seventy years of devotion and service to the realm and to the Commonwealth. Our city will also cherish the memory and privilege of hosting the Commonwealth Games, with the eyes of the world and of the nation witnessing the faultless delivery of an event rightly known as 'the friendly games'.

We recall the extraordinary days of national mourning for Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth – so fresh in the memory – and the accession of King Charles, for whom we pray today. Those days, with the long pilgrimage-like procession of mourners to Westminster Hall and the Queen's final farewell journey from Balmoral to Windsor, remind us of our admiration and respect for a life of duty and service and our appreciation for integrity and selflessness in public life.

By contrast, we shall carry with us the unsettled memories of the terrible war in Ukraine – witnessing the suffering and the courage of the Ukrainian people, with so many of our fellow citizens offering a refuge to those who had to flee, and acknowledging the global impact of these tragic events.

Our own experience of political instability and uncertainty over the last few months is also contributing to anxiety and hardship within our local communities. As we approach the turning-point of the year we know that 2023 will bring its own burdens to families and people in vulnerable situations. The faith communities of our city, together with many voluntary organisations, are already offering immediate help and support through a widespread network of food-banks and community hubs.

There is much to remember – but this Sunday, the Feast of Christ the King, is also about looking forward, with the season of Advent just a week away and the build-up to Christmas already transforming the landscape of the city-centre. For Christians, November – with its recollection of the faithful departed – leads into Advent’s remembering of Christ’s first coming – the focus of our Christmas celebrations.

But Advent begins by looking ahead to the second coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom of God – picking up the theme of today’s Feast of Christ the King and anticipating the joy of entering God’s house and encountering again the companionship of all those who have died looking forward to eternal life. As we sang in the psalm: *I rejoiced when I heard them say: ‘Let us go to God’s house’.*

The welcome presence of our young people at today’s Mass reminds us of the youthful character of our city, with one of the highest percentages of young people in the country. In our liturgical calendar, as well as being the Feast of Christ the King, today is also designated as World Youth Sunday within the Catholic Church.

Our young people play a vital part in living out their faith by witnessing to others in their words and deeds – reflecting the message of the Gospel, that our lives can be judged by the way we treat other people. This morning we are going to receive a message from Cheryl Pereira, one of the Cathedral altar-servers, speaking on behalf of the young people who are active in the life of the Church.

The Civic Mass is an important opportunity to pray for God’s blessing upon our city. As we continue to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, we pray for all the people who have served us and on whose dedication and skills we depend. They deserve our prayers as they give of their best to assist all those who are most in need during difficult and unsettling times.

We know from experience that those who do a great deal of good in our society are often unconscious of their achievements. So it is inspiring and gratifying when our civic leaders and institutions are able to recognise their good deeds.

I am particularly grateful for the witness of the students and staff in our universities and I thank the Vice Chancellor of Birmingham Newman University, Professor Jackie Dunne, for being with us here today. We can learn much from their passionate concern for justice, for the integrity of creation and environmental issues, and for peace in the world.

While aware of many of the challenges that we face, we also recognise the blessing of being able to celebrate our rich diversity as citizens of Birmingham and to live in peace with one another. We cherish the liberties that our civic life guarantees. Today we also remember those who do not enjoy the freedoms that we can so easily take for granted.

I've mentioned a number of groups and organizations in our city this morning – but I would like the last word today to be from our young people themselves – and so I now invite Cheryl Pereira to share her message with us.

WELCOME

Welcome to this Civic Mass on the Feast of Christ the King. A warm welcome from Mgr Timothy, the Dean of St Chad's Cathedral, from the trustees of the Archdiocese and from myself to all our guests and visitors and to those who are united with us in prayer through the live-streaming of this Mass.

I welcome our many civic guests, those representing the cultural, political, religious and academic life of our city, and those frontline workers and service providers whose work has been so vital, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

Bishop Anne Hollinghurst and Dean Matt Thomson from St Philip's Cathedral have sent their apologies as well as their greetings today. I am grateful to both of them, and to Bishop David Urquhart now ministering in London, for the ecumenical friendships that inspire and sustain our work together.

I welcome to the Cathedral:

- His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant, Mr John Crabtree (together with the Lord Lieutenant's cadet, Corporal Mathew Fowling)**
- The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Cllr Maureen Cornish and the Lord Mayor's Consort, Mr Malcolm Cornish**
- The High Sheriff of the West Midlands, Mr David Moorcroft and Mrs Linda Moorcroft**
- Major Samuel Edgar representing the Salvation Army, along with other members of the Birmingham Faith Leaders Group.**
- Chief Superintendent Richard North representing the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police and Mr Simon Foster, the West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner.**

- **His Majesty's High Court Judges & Circuit Judges (both serving and retired)**
- **Mr Mark Aspinall and magistrates representing the Birmingham & Solihull Magistrates**
- **Professor Jackie Dunne, the Vice Chancellor of Newman University**
- **Mr Keith Stokes-Smith, the President of the Consular Association and other Honorary Consuls**
- **Ms Gillian Guy, the Chairman of Warwickshire & Birmingham Royal British Legion**

Finally, I welcome representatives from organisations and societies within the Archdiocese, St Chad's Cathedral Association and all our Cathedral parishioners.

And now - please stand as we begin this Civic Mass by asking for the gift of God's pardon and peace in the world through the merciful love of Christ the King.

ENVOI

Thank you once again for joining us here in the Cathedral or from your home for this morning's Civic Mass.

My thanks to Mgr Timothy, to the Cathedral staff and volunteers, to the altar-servers, the Papal Knights and Dames and to our Master of Ceremonies Fr Dominic for their support of today's celebration.

I also thank Professor David Saint and the Cathedral Choir for their wonderful contribution to our Cathedral worship today and throughout the year.

May you all be blessed with a joyful Advent and a peaceful Christmas in the weeks to come.