

The Archbishop preached this sermon at St Margaret's, Westminster this evening at a Memorial Service for Sir David Amess MP.



Isaiah 12; I Thessalonians 4:13-18

Come Holy Spirit and comfort our hearts with the fire of your love. Amen.

The noble calling of politicians in a democracy is to make all manner of sacrifices - seen and unseen - for the freedom and prosperity of our nation. It is for that reason that across the nation we should be thankful to everyone who is here, and throughout especially the House of Commons, who give so much, despite the cynicism, abuse and cruelty that they so often endure.

Too often, when great tragedies happen, we have to reflect that the best seem to be the first to suffer. In this great tragedy, there is a unanimous conviction amongst all who knew him that Sir David was of the best. Eloquent contributions in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords have spoken of his exceptional character. A friend to his constituents and to his constituency; a wholehearted supporter of causes from the now-achieved City Status for Southend, to great causes of the future of our nation around Brexit.

And all with a robust fairness of spirit and charity of heart that won the admiration and affection of all sides, regardless of whether they agreed with him politically or not.

It was a charity of heart that came from his deep Catholic Christian faith, which was mentioned so often, by so many, in the Lords.

He was of the best, and his name will be remembered with Airey Neave, Robert Bradford, Anthony Berry, Ian Gow and Jo Cox, those MPs murdered since 1945, and others - like Andrew Pennington - who have died in the course of public service.

Public service in politics is a sacrifice that should be honoured and respected, even when differences of opinion run very deep indeed. David showed that.

Sacrifice is the rent paid to liberty by those who represent us. But when the cost is seen so visibly, with such demonic horror, what do we say so that we may comfort the grieving and be resilient in tragedy?

First, that the light lit by public service must not be put out. Even in the darkest moments – and especially for Julia and David’s children, this is as dark as could be – light continues. In our first reading we heard the words of the prophet Isaiah to defeated Jewish captives held in slave labour camps outside Babylon. Their King was overthrown, their temple destroyed, their leaders scattered to the winds. Yet Isaiah speaks of future triumph because of the faithfulness of God.

Cruel adversity is not final destiny. Darkness does not endure.

The light that Sir David held out through his service, inspired by his strong personal faith – that light held by all in public service – may flicker but it will not be extinguished. In the face of such injustice, it must be for all of us to determine to shine that light all the more brightly.

Second, there is the promise of justice. St. Paul’s words are to a small church grieving humanly for those who had died. Paul tells them that grief is right and normal, but for those who are servants of Christ, like David, grief is accompanied by the certainties of life and justice. Life because Christ rose from the dead and gives life; justice because there is a final judgement where all that is good, and all that is evil, is judged by God.

We mourn and grieve, and so we must. We shudder at loss, how could we do otherwise? Yet we also thank those who serve in politics: we need them, we join them in commitment to the life of hope through their service – a service to which all are called to emulate David in kindness, humour, grace and simply sheer goodness.

Above all, we hold to the Christian certainty of life, to the joy of justice done. David, full of faith, will rest in peace and rise in glory.

Grief remains the deepest pain, but God promises an end in light, and love, and the enduring hope of the resurrection.

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