

Read Archbishop Justin's article on why he wears the Cross of Nails for Lent Extra magazine



Almost every day, I wear the Cross of Nails. For me, and others around the world, it is a symbol of the transformational power of the Cross, the possibility of healing, and the promise of hope.

The original was made from nails salvaged from Coventry Cathedral after it was bombed in World War Two. In the days that followed, powerful symbols emerged from the ruined cathedral. Two burnt roof beams — which had fallen in the shape of a cross — were bound and placed where the altar had been. Three medieval roof nails were formed into a cross, which became the original Cross of Nails. The words “Father Forgive” were written on the wall of the ruined chancel. Some wondered whether it meant “Father, forgive them”: the enemy who had bombed their city, ended lives, and destroyed livelihoods. But they were reminded of the Epistle to the Romans: “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

At Christmas, six weeks later, the Provost, Dick Howard, vowed that when the war ended, they would work with those who had once been enemies to “rebuild a kinder, more Christ-like world”. Thousands of nails strewn over the floor of the Cathedral were turned into crosses. After war, they took these crosses to Germany, Japan, and Italy — and as the years went by — around the world as signs of reconciliation. In September 1947 a Cross of Nails was presented to St Nikolai Church, Kiel, Germany, a symbol of peace between former enemies.

Since then, the new Coventry Cathedral, rebuilt next to the ruins (itself a powerful symbol of hope and restoration), has continued this legacy and become a centre for peace-making and reconciliation around the world. The partnerships that emerged from the war became the international Community of the Cross of Nails, which continues to grow globally.

While I was Canon for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral, I presented these crosses in places of conflict around the world. This gesture is not one of ivory tower isolation, or naivety: it speaks to the very heart of the wars, torture and terror that so fill our world.

In October 2016, Lambeth Palace became the 200th partner of the Community of the Cross of Nails. In Rome the day following the service we had held, I gave Pope Francis a Cross of Nails. It remains for me a symbol of our partnership in the Godly work of reconciliation.

I am humbled to wear my Cross of Nails as a reminder of the hope of God and the possibility of reconciliation – the promise that new life can emerge from ashes, friendship can be borne out of hatred, and that no situation is beyond the transformation that Jesus offers us on the Cross.

Every Friday at Lambeth Palace, we pray the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation together. My hope is that you too might find this prayer brings you closer to one another and to the God who so graciously forgives and renews:

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The Coventry Litany of Reconciliation

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

FATHER FORGIVE

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

FATHER FORGIVE

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,

FATHER FORGIVE

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

FATHER FORGIVE

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,

FATHER FORGIVE

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women, and children,

FATHER FORGIVE

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

FATHER FORGIVE

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you

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