



On Wednesday I spoke outside the Reichstag in Berlin, to a gathering of about 20-30,000 Christians gathered for the event they call the Kirchentag. All the flags were at half mast, for Manchester. There was a great wave of sorrow and sympathy.

Five months ago, in Berlin, as people went about preparing for Christmas, a terrorist killed 12 people and injured many more. On Monday night in Manchester terror was once again directed at people – many of them children – who were simply going about their daily lives, enjoying the excitement of a concert.

The terrorist aims to cause division and disintegration, with fear and horror to separate us from our fellow human beings. As Easter Christians who follow Jesus Christ, conqueror of all death and evil, we reply in the words of Martin Luther's great hymn, 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God'.

Yet we must share the reality of suffering as well as proclaim the power of God. Those injured and bereaved before Christmas are still suffering, as are so many other victims of terror around the world. The attention of the world moves on, but their hurt and pain remains. Those injured and bereaved in Manchester are beginning a long, hard and cruel journey. For all of them we mourn, we lament, we cry out.

And we pray. We pray 'Thy Kingdom Come', for a kingdom where his peace shall know no end, where none shall mourn and there will be no more tears.

Prayer moves us closer not only to God, but to one another. It connects us with those whom we otherwise cannot see. Prayer breaks down division, in prayer we take each other's hands and find our safe stronghold.

Jesus himself put on our lips the prayer in which we say 'Thy Kingdom Come'. It's a prayer which acknowledges things aren't as they should be. It's a prayer which we pray through tears as we hear stories of the devastation that humans can bring onto the world, as we see the pain of sorrow and suffering. 'Thy Kingdom Come' is a deep cry of longing for a different world.

As we pray this, we find ourselves in the company of Jesus who heralded and embodied the coming of the Kingdom. We find not only that there is one who listens, but more profoundly, there is one who knows. At the heart of our faith is the love of one who died and is now alive, and he is Emmanuel, 'God with us'.

Isolation is one of our greatest fears and realities. Suffering can compound and intensify it. But in Christ Jesus, God has come to bear our pains and sorrows. Jesus has come to the darkest place of the greatest pain, the deepest anguish and most profound god-forsakenness. And because this man of sorrows, who knows deep suffering from the inside, is now alive, having been raised by God from the grave, we have hope. Hope that the one who journeys with us through the valley of the shadow of death is the only one who can lead us to the kingdom of life. Suffering and evil will not have the last word, the Kingdom of God will come. For all that is dark has been overcome in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This gives us every ground for hope.

We are not alone in our prayers, for the risen Jesus has ascended and lives in heaven for us. And he lives to pray for us. As the orthodox archpriest John Kronstadt said, 'When you are praying alone, and your spirit is dejected, and you are wearied and oppressed by your loneliness, remember then, as always, that God the Trinity looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun.'

On the first day of resurrection, Easter Sunday, we are told that Jesus' disciples were in a locked up room. They were in utter trauma due to all they had been through. They were broken and lost. But then the risen Jesus came among them and spoke to them. His first words were, 'Peace be with you'. He then breathed the Holy Spirit onto them.

In these days of great pain and anguish, where there are many questions and few answers, let us pray that Jesus would enter all the rooms that are locked by fear.

Let us pray that he would breathe his Spirit into those of us who long for the coming of His Kingdom and His living presence would bring us peace beyond our understanding.

Thy Kingdom Come, the global wave of prayer taking place between Ascension and Pentecost, starts today. To find out more, visit

www.thykingdomcome.global

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