

The Archbishop took part in the York Holocaust Memorial Day Civic Event today. His talk follows in full...

I'm humbled and honoured to be part of this Holocaust memorial event, for in remembering these horrors and the millions of Jewish People - and others besides - who were slaughtered in the death camps of a wicked and godless regime, we commit ourselves, here in this city of sanctuary and in our nation, to building a world where these horrors are never repeated, and we do this, first of all, by the very act of remembering: by looking – painful and distressing though it is – at the human capacity for evil, and the terrible ways we divide ourselves against one another, particularly on grounds of nation, ethnicity and religion, and particularly the way throughout history that Jewish people have been stigmatised and persecuted. We also remember that each of those who died was a beloved mother, father, son, daughter, someone with whom we share a common humanity and with whom, for the sake of their memory and for the building of a better world of justice and inclusion, commit ourselves to change.

Inspired by this year's theme of being light in the midst of darkness, I therefore want to offer a prayer that, among other things, challenges me to change. It is a Jewish prayer, but a prayer that I believe can be offered by all people of faith and shared in by all people of goodwill. We do not know the author of the prayer. Found in the clothing of a dead child following the liberation of the Ravensbruck concentration camp, it shows that even out of the darkest and most unspeakably inhuman wickedness, some good and some light can shine, demonstrating that stripped of everything else, the one thing, you can't take away from a human being is their decision to choose how they respond, and somehow, inexplicably, and for me unimaginably, because I cannot see that I would be able to have the same grace were I to be in such a position, this unknown person made this prayer –

'Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill will. But, do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering – our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.'

Let us be clear, only the victim can offer forgiveness, which is why I suppose only a victim could offer this prayer. But even then forgiveness does not take away the pain and horror that has been experienced, nor its consequences in people's lives. There is still a need for justice. But, in the end, unless we seek the path of a justice that is tempered by mercy and that seeks reconciliation – a true shalom - then we risk further horrors and there will be further genocides to come. It is for such a peace that we pray and hope for tonight.

3 min read

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