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FAITH PERSPECTIVE - A bridge of peace, a door of reconciliation

Sermon preached by The Venerable Scott Harte at the Installation of The Very Revd Dr William Morton as Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral on Saturday 24 September 2016

The twenty–fifth of June 2011 witnessed the opening of the Derry/Londonderry Peace Bridge which spans the River Foyle from Ebrington Square to the city centre. More significantly, and in a broader community regeneration context, it seeks to improve relations between the largely unionist “Waterside” and the predominantly nationalist “Cityside”. Already firmly established as a contemporary place of pilgrimage, the bridge has become a focal point of civic activity, and has radically changed perceptions of the “Maiden City” both locally and further afield.

However, as many present here today are acutely aware, the construction of the Peace Bridge marked the culmination of much bridge building which had already been accomplished. Patiently and unobtrusively, through the efforts of dedicated individuals, including our new Dean, relationships marred by bitterness and suspicion were transformed by trust and goodwill into a common resolve to work together towards a brighter and better future.

For those who strive to be followers of the Way, to use the oldest designation of the christian church for itself, this approach has a very important precedent. When our Lord Jesus Christ

came to enlarge his kingdom of justice, peace and love, he did not primarily engage in sophisticated strategies or ingenious initiatives. Instead, he reached out in love and friendship to all kinds of people, irrespective of their race, culture or religion, regardless of their social status, abilities or disabilities. He enhanced the lives of many with a value, a dignity and a worth they had never known. He enabled the vulnerable and the marginalised to enter into a fuller and more abundant life. “He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near”. (Ephesians 2:17)

In welcoming William Morton as Dean of Saint Patrick’s, we journey from a city with a bridge of peace to a cathedral with a door of reconciliation which also symbolises the healing of divisions.

In 1492 two prominent Irish families, the Butlers of Ormond and the Fitzgeralds of Kildare were engaged in a bitter and violent feud. Seeking sanctuary, Black James, nephew of the Earl of Ormond, and his men fled into the Chapter House of this cathedral, the Fitzgeralds following in hot pursuit. Their leader Gerald Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, realised that the fighting was beyond

control. Through the closed chapter house door he pleaded in vain with Black James to accept a truce. Then, in a tremendous initiative of courage and daring, Fitzgerald hacked a hole in the door and thrust through his arm as a pledge of good faith. He chanced his arm. It might have been cut off but instead the door was opened and the two warring faction greeted one another in peace. “Behold, how good and joyful thing it is : brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1)

Today, at this service of Installation, a bridge of peace and a door of reconciliation come together to reveal a window of opportunity. Arresting new vistas are in prospect. But at the outset, we hope William, Rosemary, Patrick, Nicky and Connor will increasingly discover that these unique religious, educational, historical and cultural precincts, which attract a wealth of visitors and pilgrims from all over the world, also embrace an environment of warmth and welcome and hospitality. That is most certainly what they experienced among the people of Saint Columb’s Cathedral which, under Dean Morton’s leadership, has been beautifully and magnificently restored. And how appropriate it is to have the two cathedral choirs at this Service, maintaining and developing a highly valued

Anglican choral tradition of men and boys' voices. "Sing, sing ye heavenly choir!" The Dean's rich and distinctive giftedness has much to contribute to the life of Saint Patrick's, not only in the pursuit of musical and liturgical excellence, but also in its mission to support those agencies on the front line that seek to address the needs of the local community and beyond.

But I believe his presence will be most intensely experienced at a much more personal level. For here, as throughout his varied ministry in the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe, not only in Saint Columb's Cathedral, but also in Limavady, Letterkenny and Gartan, he will be what he has always been and he will do what he has always done; building bridges, opening doors, reaching out in love and friendship, caring, affirming, supporting, encouraging, uplifting, working alongside you to further that inclusive and enigmatic kingdom where losing is winning, where seeking is finding, where giving is receiving, where dying is living, where greatness is measured by service, and where every ending has the hope, and the possibility, of a new beginning.

“To the King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17)

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