

Many themes of Pope Francis' papacy were part of Father Doyle's life: charity, generosity, bridge building and brotherhood, *Fratelli Tutti!* - Bishop Deenihan

• Homily by Bishop Tom Deenihan for the Opening of the Cause of the Servant of God, Father William Doyle SJ

Homily

You are very welcome to our celebration this afternoon. I welcome particularly the Archbishops and Bishops who join me today, the members of the Jesuits, the pupils, staff and past pupils from the Jesuit schools, the head chaplains to the Irish and British armies, people from around the world, present and watching on webcam who have devotion to Father William Doyle, the members of the Cathedral and Diocesan Choirs under Gerard Lillis and Jim Walsh and especially the members of Father Doyle's family.

The Feast of Christ the King is a special feast here given that this Cathedral was the First to be dedicated to Christ the King.

The notions of God's Kingdom, on earth as in heaven, and our obligation to work for that Kingdom are central points of today's liturgy.

Of course, the feast always occurs in November, coming at the end of the Church's year. November begins with our celebration of All Saints and then, All Souls.

In a way, the opening of the cause of the Servant of God, Father Willie Doyle, touches upon all these elements.

Father Doyle was certainly conscious of the need for everyone, the baptized, the professed and the ordained to work for the Kingdom of God. Indeed, during his noviciate in this Diocese of Meath, he signed an oath offering his life. His less well-known quality as a spiritual director saw him encourage many towards priesthood and religious life. Indeed, by way of example, he was instrumental in getting Sister Maria Dwyer, a Cork woman and daughter of a local businessman, to return from Belgium and establish a Poor Clare Monastery in Cork, a monastery that is still going well, thank God.

That heroic desire of Father Doyle to serve and promote God's Kingdom found ultimate expression on the battlefield when he was ministering, as an army chaplain, to soldiers, some of whom were Catholic, others Anglican.

After bringing a soldier to safety, Father Doyle returned to the line of fire and was killed ministering to others. Pope Francis talks of the Church being a 'Field Hospital', it is an image that is appropriate here. Indeed, we are told that Father Doyle nominated for the Victoria Cross

for bravery but it was not granted due to he being, as an article in the *Irish Times* put it a few weeks ago, suffering from the three disadvantages of being Catholic, a Priest and a Jesuit!

Since his death in 1917, his cult or following has remained strong and widespread. Since announcing today's ceremony, I have been struck by the extent of that cult. Father Doyle's name comes up in the most unexpected of places. Indeed, my favourite story of him is contained in Alfred O'Rahilly's biography of Father Doyle, written almost one hundred years ago. After Father Doyle's death, his father's house was being burgled and Doyle's father was powerless to stop it. The burglar came across a photograph of Father Doyle on the dresser and asked who it was. Doyle's father said that it was his son who lost his life as an Army Chaplain. The burglar responded that he knew him. He was a soldier and Doyle was his chaplain, he said. He said that Doyle was a good man, dropped his bag of stolen property and walked out empty handed. Perhaps a case of Doyle's first miracle?

Indeed, a recent article in *The Tablet* by Melanie McDonagh quotes the journalist Sir Philip Gibbs who described Doyle 'speeding all day, hither and thither over the battlefield like an angel of mercy; his words of absolution were the last words heard on earth by many an Irish lad that day, and the stooping figure of a priest and father filled the glance of many in their agony'.

Another tribute to Father Doyle came from a member of the Orange Order who said that 'We could not possibly agree with his religious opinions, but we simply worshipped him for other things. He did not know the meaning of fear. He was as ready to risk his life to take a drop of water to a wounded Ulsterman as to assist men of his own faith and regiment.' Philip Gibbs called him a martyr for Charity.

Patrick Kenny's more recent book, *To raise the fallen*, provides further account, scholarship and inspiration. It is remarkable that so much has been written and that the demand for such is strong

Father Doyle has something to say to our time when bridge builders are scarce. Nationality, creed and political belief were to him secondary and subservient to being a child of God. Indeed, one can see so many of the themes of Pope Francis' papacy in Doyle's life: charity, generosity, bridge building and brotherhood, *Fratelli Tutti!*.

On the first of November, we celebrated the Feast of All Saints. A celebration of those whose statues and pictures adorn our churches and homes. But that Feast also commemorates the more Pauline interpretation of Sainthood. Those who led good and holy lives and are now with God in heaven. We have known those Pauline Saints. They handed on the faith to ourselves, they worshipped here and in every church, they suffered, offered, inspired, prayed and loved.

There can be no doubt that Doyle is one of those Pauline Saints. It is inconceivable that the God of Love and the Father of all mercies would not be moved by his heroism to those who

suffered and his determination to bring absolution and comfort to those who were dying in muddy and bloodied fields..

The Canonised Saints are somewhat different. Their Cause has been tried and tested by the Church and miracles have been attested to.

Today, we begin the cause for Canonisation for Father Willie Doyle. We cannot but be moved by his story, we are inspired by his faith, we are encouraged his generosity and witness and we pray that he will be soon counted among those whom we publicly venerate and implore.

Whether it will be successful or not, we cannot know, we can only hope. In the meantime, Doyle's charity, generosity and evangelical zeal has something to offer ourselves. His regard, compassion, sacrifice and witness to all who are suffering, regardless of nationality or creed is still a lesson for our time.

We pray that one day we shall count him amongst the canonised saints and enjoy his intercession on our behalf.