

Fr Willie Doyle SJ, Beatification Process

I am grateful to you all for this invitation to say a few words here in the Cathedral of Christ the King on this feast day of Christ the King. In the everyday world the meaning of the word King is familiar to us – the news of Prince Charles becoming King after the death of his mother was a global event.

But the Kingship of Christ is a very different thing from what our world understands. It is not Kingship as we know it. As we hear in today's gospel in those last, dark hours of his life, Christ's kingship remains an uncanny thing. His crown is made of thorns, his throne is the executioner's cross. When he allows himself to be mocked tortured and bled dry, his kingship is not in suspension; it is being exercised. His utter self-emptying, his perfect sympathy with human suffering, is a kingly act., a divine act - God's thoughts are not ours.

The war that Fr Willie Doyle served in as a chaplain was an imperialist war where rulers sent young men to their deaths to try and preserve their own earthly kingdoms. They were sacrificed on the altar of the greedy and the powerful. In Fr Willies own words from a letter of 5 August 1917, just days before his death at the battle of Passchendaele (quoted in Dr Pat Kenny's heartfelt book about Willie, **To Raise the Fallen**)

My poor brave boys, they are lying now out on the battlefield some in a little grave dug and blessed by their chaplain who loves them all as if they were his own children; others still and stark with staring eyes hidden in a shell hole where they had crept to die, while perhaps in some far off thatched cabin an anxious mother sits listening for the well-known step and voice which will never gladden her ear again.

Fr Willie wanted to love and serve Jesus from an early age. And that desire spilled out in loving service of those young men, with no thought of his own wellbeing or survival. He never asked what creed or class they were, what faith they had, He simply stayed with them, sharing communion, confession or just his presence. As one report in the Daily Express of 1917 put it

He went forward and back over the battlefield with bullets whining about him, seeking out the dying and kneeling in the mud beside them to give them absolution, walking with death with a smile on his face. His familiar figure was seen and welcomed by hundreds of Irishmen who lay in that bloody place.

The life and death of Fr Willie Doyle is a stark shining witness to the radical and demanding call that our Christian faith makes of us. We are charged to live by standards that the world does not value – to walk in solidarity with the poor, to give hospitality to the stranger, the migrant, to visit the sick, to forgive our enemies – whoever they may be, - not go to battle with them.

It's a tough call, but people like Fr Willie Doyle can be our inspiration, and the gospel readings assure us that the radical kingship of Christ means that the Lord is with us

all the way, in total solidarity with our human suffering, filling us with the grace and power of his love unto death.

So, I am very grateful to Bishop Deenihan for launching the canonization cause of Fr Willie Doyle SJ tonight and grateful to Dr Pat Kenny, who has championed Fr Willie's cause which the Irish Jesuit Province is delighted to support with Fr John Hogan of the Meath diocese as the postulator. May their work be blessed. And may you all be blessed here as Fr Doyle said he was, on the bloody battlefield with, and I quote, **a strange confident feeling of trust and security in the all powerful protection of our Blessed Lord**".