

Last Wednesday morning, along with many others, I watched Donald Trump, as President elect of the United States, make his acceptance speech to supporters after Hilary Clinton had phoned him to offer her congratulations.

It was something of a surreal moment. There were of course swift reactions. There was a very understandable jubilation among his supporters. International leaders sent messages of congratulation with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The stock markets had a period of panic but later recovered. Others in the United States were appalled and marched in protest to express their dismay.

We are certainly moving into uncharted territory. People are unsure about the new President's attitude to global trade, to climate change, towards Russia. Comments made during the campaign concerning minority groups, racial stereotyping have raised concern in many quarters. We are left asking was this just campaign rhetoric or are we seeing the basis of future policy?

Later that day, talking to staff in the White House, President Obama spoke characteristic words of wisdom as he spoke of democracy, that in a democracy people will still campaign for what they believe in, with that comes disappointment when people lose an election. He reminded them of the importance of the peaceful transfer of power from one administration to another. Then he said 'Remember the sun will still come up tomorrow.' Life still goes on and we continue to meet the challenges of life.

As I thought of all this, I reflected on the context of other events that are being remembered at this time. Today is Remembrance Sunday, as we recall the end of the First World War, the dead in both World Wars and subsequent conflicts. In the carnage of the trenches, in the unimaginable horror of Auschwitz and other camps, men, women and children endured utter darkness, signs of light and hope shone through.

While we are rightly concerned about events in the United States, we are not facing fascist dictatorship, we are not watching the wholesale slaughter of a whole people. As President Obama reminded his staff, ‘The sun will come up tomorrow’. Political life, political argument will go on. The events we remember on Remembrance Day remind us of the cost of our freedoms, the importance of building a society with standards and values worthy of those who gave their all.

A month ago we were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the first church on this site and the 150th anniversary of the consecration of this church. As the Archbishop of Armagh reminded us, this Church was built in a time of uncertainty for the Church of Ireland. The preparations for the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland were under way. In the Archbishop’s house in Dublin there is a table that came out of the house of William Gladstone. It now bears the inscription ‘Around this table Gladstone and his associates plotted the destruction of the Ancient and Apostolic Church of Ireland.’ Contrary to the fears of many, the Disestablishment of our Church and with it the loss of wealth, of status, of privilege, did not result in the destruction of our Church, rather the renewal of our Church. As President

Obama might have reminded our people at that time, ‘The sun will come up tomorrow.’

Or is all this just wishful thinking – ‘Sure won’t it all work out in the end?’ It is at this point that I just turn to the provisions made in our lectionary and Prayer Book for this 2nd Sunday before Advent. In the portion we used instead of our Psalm this morning, the canticle Song of Isaiah, we have a passage written at a very troubling time in the history of the Kingdom of Judah as it entered that chaotic period that ended up with Jerusalem being overrun, the Temple destroyed, the leaders being led off into exile in Babylon. In the midst of all this, the Prophet declares. ‘Surely God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid.’ Even in the midst of judgement, the prophets still speak of God’s continuing care, God’s continuing purposes for his people.

Our post communion prayer this morning is short and to the point.

Gracious Lord,
in this holy sacrament you give substance to our hope.

What is that substance? As we break the bread and drink the cup we remember the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In a seemingly pointless and cruel death, in a forgotten corner of the Roman Empire, something crucial happened that has impacted on the life of this earth ever since, that has inspired men and women, that has transformed societies. It has been dismissed as irrelevant, his followers have been mocked, abused, persecuted.

Hymns, poetry have a way of encapsulating deep and profound truth. There is a hymn in our book, hymn 669, that I confess is not among my favourites, but the refrain always speaks to me.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives, All fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because He lives.

Things may happen that may make us doubt, that may drive us to despair. Things go wrong, communities, societies make mistakes; people, innocent people suffer. The events we recall in Remembrance, in the Disestablishment of our Church remind me of the importance of keeping faith with our convictions, with our commitment to justice, to peace, to reconciliation. The figure of the broken and battered, risen and glorified Jesus serves as a constant inspiration and reminder of God's abiding purposes for us and for all men.

In place of Barak Obama's reminder, 'The sun will still come up in the morning', in union with all who have gone before us in the faith, we proclaim in the words of the 3rd Eucharistic Prayer :

dying, you destroyed our death,
rising, you restored our life;
Lord Jesus, come in glory.