

Who can ever forget the images of the burning Grenfell Tower? They are seared into our imagination. They touch our hearts so deeply. Indeed, they break our hearts. With the passing of time, they do not lose their power. What we see, in reality, in the eye of memory, reaches our hearts, bringing dismay, sadness, anger and sheer horror.

There is also a pathway to our hearts in what we hear.

Day by day, at present, we hear stories of those whose lives were changed forever by this fire. We listen to their accounts and their emotions, and our hearts almost stop beating, such is the immensity of what happened. In listening we are again overwhelmed by the horror of this tragedy.

This evening we gather to pray. We pray for all who have been caught up in this unforgettable disaster. We pray for all who did their best, even if with hindsight it wasn't well judged. We pray especially for those who died, the 72 whose names we shall hear in the courtyard after Mass, remembering the 15 members of this parish among them. We pray for those who mourn their loss. We pray for all whose hearts were broken one year ago today.

What, you might ask, is the point of this prayer?

Prayer, too, is a pathway to the heart. Prayer is a way of reaching and touching the deepest part of our own hearts. Prayer is also a way into the heart of God.

In prayer, we strive to express that which is often inexpressible. Indeed, as St Paul teaches us, we ask the help of the Holy Spirit who 'expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means' (Romans 8:26).

In this way, our prayer not only arises from our deepest hearts but also reaches the heart of God. With Jesus, in prayer, we

simply whisper into the ear of God all that burdens us so much. And our whispering reaches the heart of God, carried there by his only beloved Son.

This prayer, our prayer this evening, takes us to the very heart of the mystery of our living and dying. We live within the embrace of God. We die, falling into that same embrace, but now without encumbrance or limitation.

In the Gospel passage we have heard, St John tell us of the faith of Martha, the faith by which she lived through the death of her brother. When Jesus says, 'I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he die, he will live' Martha replies, 'Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world. (John 11:25-27). This is the faith by which we too are invited to live through this time, this experience, this tragedy.

In the other two readings, from Isaiah and the Book of Revelation, our faith is expanded beyond this realm. Remember the two great images of heaven, given for our immense consolation? When we are immersed in sorrow and dismay, even through our tears, we can glimpse that 'new heaven and new earth', the 'holy city coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband' (Revelation 21:2). When our hearts are broken, or consumed with resentment and anger, we do not lose sight of the vision of the heavenly banquet 'of rich food, a banquet of fine wines' at which God will 'remove the mourning veil covering all people and the shroud enwrapping all nations' (Isaiah 25:7).

It is the power of prayer to open again our hearts to this hope, this steadfast and reliable promise given by God and sealed in the precious blood of his Son. It is the pathway of prayer, which we take again this evening, to equip us to live together even through the worst of times, as has been shown in this parish, in this neighbourhood, in the very worst of those times.

And there is one more pathway opened up by prayer. Prayer takes us into the heart of our family, for in prayer we learn again that we are all children of one Heavenly Father. This is only one source of life and all those who lift up their hearts to that one source of life, no matter what words they use, are bonded together. Prayer defines the true shape of our human family. This is more profoundly true, more powerfully so, of those who lift up their prayer in, through and with Jesus Christ, who leads us in our faith and is our supreme high priest (Hebrews 4:14) and who never ceases to intercede for us before his Father. He is the way, the truth and the life, for his entire life was the pathway of supreme prayer and the safe passage that we can all take.

Not only does Jesus carry our prayer to the heart of the Father but he also gives us, as our companion in this vale of tears, our most Blessed Mother. We are always encouraged, then, to pray to Mary, to pray with Mary for in such prayer we come together in her embrace. This too is for our great consolation. This we will do in our prayers after Mass.

Now let us take up again this pathway of prayer, carrying to our Father all our sadness and, above all, all those who lost their lives in the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower.

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster