

RECTOR'S PINT

A recent news article captured my attention. The headline read: What can you say when a Ukrainian Bishop in Kyiv asks 'Has God forgotten us'?

The Bishop is Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the Head of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine. He said this after the Russian withdrawal from Bucha, "I saw so many dead people in the street, so many men and women in mass graves".

It is a fair question, and I cannot judge the Bishop for asking it. I can only imagine what witnessing the aftermath of such an atrocity must be like, or how terrible it must be to live in the ruins of war.

It would be foolish to attempt to offer a neat explanation to the reality of suffering. So much cannot be explained. War though does have causes. Subsequent historical reflection can try and make sense of the politics, the hunger for resources, geo-political meddling and personal egos which all have their part to play - in other words, human sin! However, understanding the causes will not take away the terrible toll on life. 'Has God forgotten us'? Is a very understandable question to ask.

It is that very question though that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus on the Cross, the man Christians believe is God as man, cried out in his physical and spiritual agony "Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Christians proclaim that Jesus died for the sins of the world. The terrible truth behind that is the possibility for humans to come to a state of 'God forsakenness', and we need saving from that. For those who object to this insight, we need to look again at the account of Jesus' death when he experienced what being cut off and deaf to the goodness and grace of God was like. It was for him, a personal hell. The paradox of the Cross, however, is that in Jesus, God has taken on the full reality of human sin, failing and suffering, God in Christ has taken it all. The depth of that experience led him to utter that terrible desolate cry.

We want the world to be comfortable and good, but it is not entirely like that, and the Christian faith is honest with us about that truth. This is, of course the first part of the great story that leads us on to Easter Sunday, to the resurrection, the great Christian hope, and one we hold onto in the difficult times as well as celebrate in the good. We need to remember that God has not forgotten the pain, the suffering, and the desolation that is a part of our world, God in Christ has been to the very heart of it, but was not overcome by it so that we will be able to cry on Easter Sunday, 'Alleluia! Christ is risen, He is risen indeed Alleluia'.

Simon