

Vigil of Prayer - Tuesday, 17th August - Plymouth Cathedral

Certainly, the deaths of Maxine, Lee, little Sophie, Stephen and Kate have had a profound impact on us all.

We do not understand the madness, the darkness, that overtook their shooter five evenings ago in this hour. It is still with a sense of dismay, of deep sadness, that we gather this evening. We do so to be in silence and in solidarity, to pray for the dead, for the injured, for the loved ones of those who lost their lives, and for all those who have been deeply affected by this tragic event. We include the family of the shooter in our prayers. They, too, are victims.

As regards the shooter, our hearts are deeply disturbed. We know something of his struggle - that he felt "defeated by life" - but this does not answer the cry of our hearts regarding these innocents who have died or been injured, by his hand. So, him we can only offer to the judgment and purification of God.

The Psalmist sings that 'The Lord will guard us from evil' and we do not understand why that did not happen in our city on Thursday evening. In the face of the mystery of evil, of darkness, we can but stand in silence and lament. Our prayer for the innocent is an echo of the cry of Jesus on the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"?

The Son of God Himself knew from the inside the experience of darkness, of innocent suffering. In his own death on the Cross, Jesus confronted the mystery of evil and has overcome it. Darkness does not have the last word. In experiencing Jesus in our own lives, we seek to give comfort to one another, to our city and especially to the injured and the bereaved. Because the Son of God overcame darkness through His death, His days in the tomb and in His Resurrection, in silence and in solidarity, we pray that something of His life and light may fall upon us.

So may our city rise from this hour of darkness. So may Maxine, Lee, little Sophie, Stephen, Kate and all the dead find a place of light and of peace.

+Mark O'Toole,
Bishop of Plymouth