

ALL MY HOPE IN GOD IS FOUNDED

Address given by Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald MAfr. during the National Ecumenical Service to mark the 45th Anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Romero, at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, on 22 March 2025

Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald MAfr.

All my hope on God is founded. On this day when we are celebrating the anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Romero, which falls actually on Monday 24 March, we are concentrating on HOPE, because we badly need Hope in our world today and Archbishop Romero is a figure of hope.

We have heard a reading from St Paul to the Romans about Abraham who believed though it would seem that there was no room left for hope or belief. He was old, and his wife was old too, and yet he believed that she would bear him a child, since God had promised this.

We have heard recited a poem by a Palestinian about the people of Gaza:

My God is courage, patience, justice, the sumoud of a people.

We adore the same one God, though we understand this God differently.

Muslims say that God is al-samad, which could be translated "rock-like"; God is an all-encompassing refuge for us.

In the midst of this world, with all its difficulties, we are encouraged to take refuge in God.

As Christians, we say that this God has become one with us in Jesus Christ

So, we can truly say that our God is a stubborn refugee girl, her heart still yearning for the place she calls her own.

We can say that our God is a Gaza refugee wishing to share freedom with all of us.

We are called to believe like Abraham, our father; we are called to believe in life as Archbishop Romero did, hoping against hope that conditions will revive, conditions in Gaza, in Israel and

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Palestine, in Tigray in the North of Ethiopia, in Sudan and Eastern Congo, in Myanmar and Yemen conditions in El Salvador, conditions all around the world where there is conflict. We are encouraged to continue praying for the people in these areas of conflict, following the example of Pope Francis who, every Sunday, at the mid-day prayer, mentions these places and prays for their inhabitants.

We are called not only to pray, but to work for a renewal of life, as the Qur'an reminds us:

Have you considered the one who denies the Judgement? that is the one

who pushes aside the orphan and does not urge others to feed the needy

So woe to those who pray but are heedless of their prayer; those who are all show and forbid common kindnesses.

(Qur'an 107)

Many of us are familiar with the words of the Gospel:

Come... take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you...: For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me, in prison, and you came to see me; I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers [or sisters] of mine, you did it to me.

(Gospel according to Matthew, 25: 34-42)

This year, Ramadan and Lent fall together in the same period. We can remember that their contents are similar: fasting, prayer and alms-giving, but the reasons for engaging in these practices are different.

To fast every day during the month of Ramadan, to abstain during the hours of day-light from every intake of food or drink or of any substance is very demanding. The Christian is not asked to observe this. The Christian would be expected to forego some food or drink during the 40 days of Lent; avoiding alcohol, which is allowed at other times; avoiding chocolate or sweets; having a simple meal such as spaghetti and cheese and being able to share the amount saved with people who are in need.

There are other ways of fasting that can be chosen: avoiding watching television, curbing one's use of social media.

All this is voluntary, by way of free choice. Whereas I understand that Ramadan is observed as an act of obedience to God: "You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you... so that you may be mindful of God (Q 2: 183)."

Ramadan is practised more collectively; families gather together to break the fast.

Lent is a more individual practice.

Lent is really a way of preparing for the celebration of the greatest feast of the Christian year, Easter, the commemoration of the Passion of Jesus, of his death on the Cross, his burial, and his rising to New Life.

Nevertheless, there are common prayers in both religious traditions. Special prayers are recited in the mosque, the tarâwîh, after the last prayer of the day.

Christians have a custom of gathering in church on Friday afternoons or evenings for what we call the Way of the Cross, recalling the different ways Jesus suffered for us.

At this time when Ramadan and Lent unite us, I should like to let the voice of Archbishop Romero resound again:

As long as there are mothers who are crying about the disappearance of their sons and daughters, as long as there are tortures in the headquarters of our security forces, as long as there is horrible disorder... there cannot be peace. We need to be rational and listen to the voice of God, to organize a more just society once more according to God's heart.

(Through the Year with Oscar Romero, Daily Meditations CAFOD, D.L.T. Christian Aid 2006 p.14).

To return to our theme of Hope, we who believe in Hope, whether we are Christians or Muslims, or whatever religion we belong to, we pray earnestly to God for this gift of Hope, true hope which will generate justice-seeking solidarity, hope which may presage true peace.

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In this way we shall be true to ourselves, true to our religions and true to Oscar Romero who has given us such a good example.

Michael Cardinal Fitzgerald, M.Afr.