

## German Unity Day

Last year some of us were privileged to attend services in St Nicholas' Church in Leipzig in Germany, remembered so appropriately in the Cross of Nails prayer cycle today. That church was the focus for the so-called Peaceful Revolution that resulted in the breaking down of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the two divided parts of Germany, the western Federal Republic and the eastern communist Democratic Republic.

German reunification in 1990 is celebrated on 3 October with a public holiday, German Unity Day. The celebrations are hosted by a different city each year and this year it was the turn of Dresden. An ecumenical service was held on Monday in the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), attended by Angela Merkel and other dignitaries, and the whole of it can be seen on the internet.

As was the case of Coventry the heart of Dresden was destroyed in the bombing of the Second War. For over forty years the Frauenkirche was left a pile of rubble surrounded by a wasteland. So it remained until reunification when the church and the surrounding Baroque houses were painstakingly rebuilt. This was very much an example of a phoenix rising from the ashes. The church is a partner in the Community of the Cross of Nails. Fittingly the gilded orb and cross on top of the dome was made in this country and was Britain's Millennium gift to Germany. It was displayed in Coventry Cathedral before going to Dresden.

The Second World War saw terrible destruction and loss of life on both sides. However, the Frauenkirche in Dresden, like Coventry Cathedral, is a potent symbol of hope, rebirth and reconciliation. It exemplifies human creativity in the face of human evil. That is something to be cherished and celebrated.

Yet that is not the case today in Syria and other areas of conflict. Indeed the situation in Syria is desperate with no real end in sight. Peace and reconciliation seem further away than ever before. There appears to be no real will for the different factions to get together to talk and find a lasting and just solution. In the meantime people there continue to suffer terribly, not only physically but mentally. That hospitals and other places of refuge should be targeted is beyond our comprehension. How can human beings be so cruel, so unfeeling?

Yet we are here again to pray for peace and reconciliation, and to do so not as a lost cause but as a genuine possibility. For we put our trust in God who cares for all his people, as we heard so powerfully in our reading from the book of Job (Job 5.9-21). He is a God of peace and compassion but also a God of justice. We have to believe in the possibility that the hearts of men of violence will be turned, that good will eventually come out of evil, that God's will for all his children will be done.

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