Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough

Christ Church Cathedral

4th December 2016

Jerusalem

Revelation 21.9-14, 22-27; Luke 19.41-44

1. My dear Friends, it is a great privilege to be here with you this evening in this amazing Cathedral in this 800th year of this Diocese, and I want thank Archbishop Michael and you all for inviting me.
2. I want this evening to speak about our ecumenical life in Jerusalem. Ecumenism is very much part of my ministry in Jerusalem. The Anglican Churches is one of the 13 churches recognized in Jerusalem. We are fortunate to enjoy fruitful fellowship and excellent relationships with the other churches in the Holy Land.
3. Our ecumenism in Jerusalem is more than just friendship it is deep fellowship with shared concerns and a shared desire to follow the Mission of Christ in the Holy Land. It is a fellowship that is also reflected liturgy and the life of the Anglican Church. Let me give you a few examples:

**Week for Christian Unity**

1. First we see our fellowship during for Christian Unity we can see a real desire and joy in Jerusalem in the participation of Christians in mutual worship. The contrasting in our liturgical style is seen as a blessing in the life of the church; it enriches our Christian understanding of the working out of our Faith, reflecting different cultures and different traditions.

**Participation in celebration**

1. Second we see our fellowship strengthened and unified as we celebrate events in our churches. In the Anglican Church we are able to celebrate the re-dedicating St Saviour’s Church in Acco, in the north of Israel. Here we will be inviting our friends to come and worship and celebrate with us. This is a significant moment of celebration, as when the state of Israel was created in 1948, three of our churches were closed St Paul’s in Jerusalem; St Peter’s in Jaffa (just south of Tel Aviv) and St Saviour’s in Acco.
2. St Saviour’s is the second church to re-open. In 2011 we re-dedicated St Paul’s in West Jerusalem in 2011. St Paul’s was built in 1873 by the second Bishop, Rt. Reverend Samuel Gobat with the help of the Church Mission Society. It was used until 1948 by the Arabic Speaking Congregation. However, the creation of the state of Israel made it difficult for congregation to access the church, as it was on the West Side of the ‘green’ line which divided Israeli held West Jerusalem from Jordanian held East Jerusalem. The Arabic congregation of this Church first went to worship at Christ Church in Jaffa Gate before moving to St George’s Cathedral. This church is committed to be a sign of reconciliation and peace and to encourage mutual respect between all people. It is sited in the heart of the orthodox Jewish area.
3. Once we have opened St Saviour’s we hope to open St Peter’s in Jaffa. When St Peter’s closed in 1948 many of its congregation seeking refuge in Ramallah and Amman, including my family who were forced to move in Nablus. We are working hard to finish the repair work and have it functioning to serve, among others, the ex-patriot community in Tel Aviv.
4. Third we see our fellowship built on unique relationships where there is mutual respect. The depth of our relationship with the Armenian Church, for instance, is revealed through the long standing privilege the Anglican Bishops have had in read the Gospel at the Maundy Thursday service at the Armenian Cathedral of St James’. Our relationship with the Armenians is strong and close, as it clearly is here in this Diocese with shared worship space and the memorial erected in this Cathedral to mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and I bring greetings to you all from Patriarch Nourhan, who is sad that he cannot be present with us today.
5. Our unique relationship too is found with the Roman Catholic Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church. With the Roman Catholics we have shared missions, particularly through the support we receive from the Roman Catholic Churches and Anglican Churches in the United Kingdom. And only last month I welcomed the Anglican Archbishop of Birmingham to our Cathedral on Sunday Morning. With the Greek Orthodox’s we exploring different aspects of dialogue and communion between our two churches.
6. These are just a few examples of our ecumenism as played out in trust and in friendship. They are played out realizing that we need to be united in Christ: we cannot afford division in a land that already has so much division. Our fellowship deepens through our respect for each other and our mutual goals.
7. This is the rich thread that unites us and binds us together and speaks powerfully into our context where there is so much mistrust between communities. One of most striking of all in the Holy Land is the basic fellowship between Christians. When Christians in the Holy Land are asked, which church they belong to, their response is that they are “Christian’’. Denominations, while important to our identity and our praxis, are second to our primary identity in Christ. It is He that forms us and it is his stamp that is upon our hearts.
8. This I think is a critical point. When I read of divisions between Christians I am always sad and ask why? Are we not one body? Why are we in disagreement? In the Holy Land the Christian community is very small we think there are about 300,000 Christians in the State of Israel and the West Bank. We are diminishing as many leave the land. Yet we have an important voice and an important message.
9. It is a message that is not about place; but about people, about hearts, and about the hope and love that the message of Jesus Christ brings.. When we read in Revelation the image of the *holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*, we heard the metaphor for what Jerusalem is, what heaven is. The city of Jerusalem is indeed beautiful, it is precious; but the Christian message about Jerusalem is about that beauty and that precious being in our hearts *like a rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.*
10. When the church works together as one body, when it unites and puts its differences to one side it too sparkles like that rare jewel, reflecting not only the beauty of each of our traditions but the joy that radiates from each Christians’ heart through the knowledge and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

AMEN

The Most Reverend Suheil Dawani

Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem