

Column

Shortly after lunch on April 15 I received a text reading: “Notre Dame Cathedral is burning.” Disbelief was followed by shock and horror. In this respect, I suppose my reaction was similar to that of most on that fateful day.

As the fire raged and smoke billowed above the ancient structure, the most dramatic image to be broadcast was the central spire collapsing. That scene might be likened to death.

Much later, after the fire had been extinguished, another scene emerged. That was a large gold cross still in place suspended above the high altar.

As I looked at this cross, words of a well-known Passiontide hymn came to mind: “In the cross of Christ I glory, / towering o’er the wrecks of time; / all the light of sacred story / gathers round its head sublime.”

These words, when placed alongside the cross behind the high altar, seemed to send out an enduring and powerful message. The temples made with men’s hands, as beautiful and glorious though they be, are subject to the ravages of time and the elements of nature. Meanwhile, what was accomplished on the cross is not.

There, the chasm resulting from human sinfulness was bridged by God’s mercy. The guilty – that’s all of us – were set free. The divine image defaced in Adam was restored in Christ. Death was conquered; life to those in the grave restored.

No wonder the author of the words I just quoted, a man by the name of John Bowring, goes on to say: “It glows with peace and joy.”

Will Notre Dame Cathedral be rebuilt? I hope so. Great churches have a role to play in the proclamation of the Gospel. They are outward and visible signs of faith.

My greatest hope, though, is that the light of the cross may shine forth into all the dark places of life, including Europe, which has become something of a spiritual wasteland.

Speaking of the cross, Jesus said: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). Millions from every race and continent have come. Have you?

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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