



*Abbot Hugh Allan, o.praem.*

*Apostolic Administrator of the Falkland Islands, Ecclesial Superior of the Mission sui juris to St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension Island*

### **Pastoral Letter for the First Sunday of Advent 2018**

My dear friends in Christ,

This year we marked 100 years since the end of the First World War. On Remembrance Sunday, I spoke at the War Memorial in Chelmsford about the life of Fr William Doyle. He was a Jesuit priest who volunteered to serve as a chaplain during the First World War. He had a remarkable life.

Willie Doyle was born into a well-to-do, devoutly religious Catholic family in 1873. From this Christian home on the outskirts of Dublin, four of seven children entered some form of religious life. Having been educated in Ireland and England, Willie entered the Society of Jesus.

After long years of study, he was ordained in 1907, and soon after was assigned to the Jesuit mission to parishes throughout the British Isles. From the start he excelled as preacher and confessor, and crowds flocked to him.

When war broke out in 1914, Father Doyle volunteered immediately. He knew that, with thousands on their way to meet death, someone had to be with them, because, for many, this was going to be the definitive hour, with all lost or gained, for all eternity.

In 1915, with the Royal Irish Fusiliers, he landed in France. From then on, he marched every mile alongside the soldiers—forgoing all privileges that his officer rank afforded him. This was his “flock,” and he was their “shepherd.” By the end, these battle-hardened soldiers would come to love their Padre. It was no surprise, as he suffered as much as they did. Through barbed wire, and in spite of bullets, shells, and gas, he sought out his “sheep” as they lay dying, often alone in muddied battle fields, bringing Viaticum.

Father Doyle was mentioned in dispatches and recommended for the United Kingdom’s highest award for gallantry: the Victoria Cross. He was passed over, deemed to have a triple disqualification: Irish, Catholic, and Jesuit. It was to make little difference. His eyes were on an altogether greater prize: the sanctity and the salvation of those placed in his care.

Like his comrades, he was shot at, shelled, and gassed, narrowly missing being killed on numerous occasions, his only rest in the same rat-infested trenches. Despite his brother officers’ pleas, he refused to leave the Front, determined to be with his flock throughout this living hell.

When possible, in those flooded, fetid trenches, the sounds of hell reverberating all around, Fr Doyle, with a pyx containing the Eucharist around his neck, spent hours on his knees adoring the Prince of Peace.

Now, this is truly incredible for us to contemplate. That in the midst of the mud, blood and devastation war, Jesus Christ was truly present in those trenches. Places of horror and torment, and there, in the middle of it all, was our Saviour, the Prince of Peace.

This Sunday we begin the holy season of Advent. It is a time of preparation for us to greet the Prince of Peace, the child born in a manger. Yet we can greet Him every day. What a truly great gift we have that in our churches, we can spend time with Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist. In the midst of the confusion and chaos of the world we live in, in the messiness of our own lives, we are not abandoned by the Lord. He is always there. He never abandons us. He is with us in the trenches of our own lives.

On August 16, 1917, during the seemingly never-ending Passchendaele offensive, Father Doyle was in the dreaded “No-Man’s Land,” desperately trying to drag a wounded comrade back to safety. In so doing, he was blown to pieces. Unlike the many to whom he had given a Christian burial, his remains were hastily interred in a makeshift communal grave, while all around the battle raged on.

As we begin now the season of Advent, I hope and pray that you can all make time to go into church and simply be with the Lord in the Eucharist. Find time to stop and be still and know that he is the Lord. Come away from the battles raging around us and spend time with our Eucharistic Lord.

It is 100 years since the end of war to end all wars; the earth is still a place of turmoil and violence. Our lives and our hearts can also be places of turmoil and despair. As a beautiful antidote to this, find time to come to the Prince of Peace in the heart of our communities.

In Advent we pray “Come Lord Jesus.” Perhaps this Advent we can come to Him. Come to the peace and love that flows out from His heart. Remember the heroic example of Fr William Doyle and find time to be at peace and be with our Eucharistic Lord.

I hope and pray that you will all enjoy a peaceful Advent and celebrate a very happy and merry Christmas. May our Lord Jesus walk with you into 2019 and bless you always.

Please pray for me!

With every blessing and the assurance of daily prayers,

**+Hugh**

Abbot Hugh Allan, o.praem.