

Armed Forces service marking liberation of Rome blessed by special papal message

Edmund O'Sullivan

Bishop of the Armed Forces Paul Mason delivered a Papal message of thanks to a special service in the Catholic Forces Cathedral Church of St Michael & St George on 15th June to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Rome, and the end of the blockade of Vatican City.

The message read: 'His Holiness Pope Francis, informed of the commemoration service to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Rome to take place in the Cathedral of St Michael & St George, Aldershot, has asked me to convey his greetings of good wishes to all gathered for this occasion.'

It added: 'The Holy Father cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing to all those gathered for this anniversary and, through the intercession of the Mother of God, invokes an abundance of Divine Grace.'

The message was sent on behalf of the Holy Father by the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendia. The archbishop attended the service to deliver his own statement in person.

The service was led by Bishop Mason with support of the Cathedral's dean, Fr Nick Gosnell.

Accounts about the events leading to the liberation of Rome on 4th June were delivered by Edmund O'Sullivan, son of London Irish Rifles Colour Sergeant Ted O'Sullivan; David Sands of the Hugh O'Flaherty Memorial Society; Andrew Deakin of the Monte Cassino Society and Jenny Grant, the granddaughter of a II Polish Corps soldier who served in the Italian campaign. This was read in her absence due to sickness by Andre Adamson, the



Bishop of the Armed Forces Paul Mason, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendia and Fr Nick Gosnell with honoured guests at the service to mark the liberation of Rome in 1944. Inset, the special message from His Holiness the Pope to mark the occasion.

son of Polish Corps veteran.

Rome was liberated on 4th June by Allied armies led by US troops. It ended Nazi occupation of Italy's capital which had begun in September 1943 and broke the blockade imposed on the Vatican for seven months.

On 5th June, Pope Pius delivered a statement at St Peter's basilica, declaring that 'Rome has been saved from the horrors of war.'

Italy had been disastrously involved with the Second World War from June 1940. After huge loss of life in Africa and the Eastern front and increasingly intense Allied bombing of its cities, the Italian people were ready for peace when Allied troops landed in Sicily in July 1943.

The capture of Rome in June 80 years ago this month proved to be a false dawn, with the war in Italy continuing for 11 more months.

But there was a brief moment of celebration. Dan Kelleher, a Catholic padre serving in the British Irish Brigade, who would be awarded the military cross for bravery, worked with the Irish ambassador to the Holy See to enable 150 men of the Irish Brigade to be the first Allied troops to be granted an audience by Pope Pius after the liberation.

And so, at 9 o'clock on 12th June 1944, the Irish Brigade was in the Apostolic Palace when Pope Pius spoke the following words: "Dearly beloved sons, we bid you welcome. We are well aware of the good

which the Irish have done in spreading the faith from the shores of their green isle... into many nations. We greet you and bless you with all our hearts' affection and your dear ones at home."

The Irish Brigade then played for the pope, and the men from the brigade were given a papal blessing document and rosary beads.

80 years to the hour since Pope Pius greeted the Irish Brigade in the Vatican, Pope Francis entered St Peter's Square for the general papal audience attended by a delegation representing today's Irish Brigade

and the Royal Irish Regiment.

And like their predecessors in June 1944, the bugles, pipes and drums of the Royal Irish Regiment played after the audience for the Pope, to his obvious delight.

Refugee Week message is one of respect and dignity

To mark Refugee Week (17th – 23rd June,) Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) has released a statement calling for politicians to uphold human dignity when considering migration policies in England and Wales.

The statement encourages Catholics and the wider society to advocate for a 'just and humane asylum system that upholds the human dignity of migrants, protects refugees, and defends their right to seek asylum.'

Bishop Paul McAleenan, the lead bishop for Migrants and Refugees, welcomed the statement by saying: "CSAN's open letter serves as a timely reminder that we must stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who flee wars and seek sanctuary. We call upon our

politicians to ensure that their dignity is upheld and their rights to asylum are respected."

He added: "I have been fortunate to hear so many heartwarming



Bishop Paul McAleenan

stories about the tireless work that the Catholic community here, in England and Wales, has done to help and welcome refugees in their communities. Our response to migrants and refugees must be firmly rooted in Catholic social teaching and the innate worth of every human person."

Reflecting on the upcoming general election, Bishop Paul urged Catholics and people of goodwill voting "to think about the policies candidates are proposing regarding migration and to ask whether they keep human dignity at the heart of our immigration system."

"Our response to migrants and refugees must be firmly rooted in Catholic social teaching and the innate worth of every human person."

Meanwhile, to mark World Refugee Day on 20th June, a new report by international children's charity World Vision revealed that refugees and other vulnerable families are receiving just a fraction of their monthly required food intake or are being cut from aid distributions altogether, leading to a drastic increase in child marriage, child labour, and mental health risks.

The report, entitled *Ration Cuts: Taking from the hungry to feed the starving*, showed that 68% of people affected by ration cuts said someone in their family had gone

to bed hungry in the past month because there was not enough food. 41% of refugees thought both girls and boys are now subject to more violence, neglect or abuse at home. More than one in ten adults said they felt so hopeless that they no longer want to carry on living. Half (50%) of adults said they felt that way most or some of the time.

"These findings should instantly ring an alarm bell," said Mary Njeri, director of World Vision's global hunger response.

"We must urgently increase the essential lifesaving aid that children and their families so desperately need to survive. Long-term support is also essential so children can go back to school and families can once again farm, find jobs and support themselves."