

All Saints Sunday 28th October 2018, Canongate Kirk.

Hebrews 12:22 *You have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...*

If there's one thing I can't stand it's name-dropping, as I told The Queen just the other day. That's a joke, obviously, but name-dropping is a practice long associated with ministers connected to Canongate Kirk. The Very Revd Dr Charlie Warr was not a minister here but a member after he retired from St Giles and when his autobiography was published in 1960 with the title "The glimmering landscape", it was found to be so full of references to his encounters with the great and the good that it was immediately dubbed "The glittering handshake". And twenty years later when Dr Ronnie Selby-Wright's own autobiography "Another Home" was produced, he himself admitted being guilty of what he described as "the inevitable name-dropping". I say all this by way of preparation to tell you that on my recent visit to Rome I met up with The Most Revd Leo Cushley, Roman Catholic Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, who had kindly offered me a private tour of St Peter's and the Vatican. He had previously served as the head of the English language section of the Vatican Secretariat of State so he knew his way round pretty well and in a fascinating visit he led me from the tomb of St Peter far below the floor of the Basilica to the rooftop of the Apostolic Palace overlooking St Peter's Square and far beyond. He told me that after his crucifixion Peter had been buried, like Lazarus in our Gospel reading, in a cave outside the city itself, on the far side of the river. That's where the Romans disposed of the Christians and that's why St Peter's Basilica stands where it does today built over the tomb on the far side of the river technically outside the city of Rome. Vatican City was built on what was first known as Vatican Hill and looking at it you can't help thinking of another crucifixion on another hill beyond another city:

*There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall,
where the dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.*

Or thinking too of the words of another famous minister once associated with Canongate, The Very Revd Dr George Macleod, who in one of his many books once wrote "I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage-heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek; at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. Because that is where churchmen should be and what churchmanship should be about." That is, as I learned in Rome, where the Church began, on the edge, beyond the edge in fact, where followers of Jesus were treated just like him, every bit as cruelly, put to death and discarded, out of sight and out of mind. But All Saints is the time when we reflect on all those followers of Jesus who have died over the years, not necessarily so dramatically as the first generation, but faithful soldiers and servants, witnesses unseen and often unsung, who have built on the legacy of previous generations to hand on to the next, including ours, the challenges and opportunities of Christian service in our own day. And as we give thanks for their example, we give thanks too that their memory is not discarded, out of sight and out of mind, outside a city wall, but cherished within that great city of the living God, the very destination promised to the Hebrews and to the Christians of every generation. *You have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...* And now may God bless to us this preaching of his most holy word, and to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all praise and glory now and forever.

Amen.