

I think this annual pilgrimage to the Mother Church of Nottingham has great depths of meaning for the University. As a native of Nottingham it distresses me sometimes that our students know so little of their City; many of them could not clearly identify Parliament street except by O'Neill's, Beastmarket Hill except by the Bell, or Castlegate except by the Sal. In some ways we risk being the University of Lenton or Beeston, rather than citizens of Nottingham.

So I would invite everyone here tonight to allow this great time-capsule in which we sit to speak to us. In this moment of quiet, let the sounds of the City recede: with its Christmas lights, and the racket of commerce, of midwinter tills; let the presences return of those who have lived here before us: the people who invested and built up the firms of the Lace-Market, and before them the merchants and tradesmen who have lived on this hill since the seventh century, and even more vitally the millions of children, and women, and men who have worked here, and who have come, as we come tonight, to seek the meaning of their lives in this place.

Perhaps we feel that their struggle to add up the accounts of their lives may have differed greatly from ours. We are incomparably glitzier, more connected, more technically optimistic, than they were in the past. But our need to find meaning is, if anything, even sharper than theirs, and infinitely lonelier, less confident, more apprehensive. Where they believed they could find a purpose for the world, we are haunted by the fear that we are meaningless; where they built confidently, we are almost terrified of belonging, of committing ourselves; where they conceived of themselves as people created by God, we are unused to the idea of accepting the gift of our lives from Another's hands. The Church would say that *we have never been more in need of redemption*; but that isn't the only way to say it.

Let all the others in tonight. Let us make a place in our hearts for the people of our University, and hold them close to us in the peaceful spirit of Advent.

Let us think of the homes and families of Nottingham, with all their hopes and fears, their needs as Christmas approaches.

We remember the unemployed, and those who suffer in body or mind, and who look forward to uncertain times.

We call to mind the homeless, and the unloved; the addicted, and the victims and authors of crime and violence.

We hear the quiet voices of the world's poor, coming to us as they now do with clarity and insistence as never before.

Let us be grateful for all we can do to help, and bless, and accompany those who need us. We thank the giver of our gifts for the achievements of our University in medicine, agriculture, science and technology, education, in music, and in the search for wisdom in all things.

We ask the grace to receive the Gift of love this Christmas, light for this darkness, faith and hope for this confusion, comfort and joy for the world's grief.

May our world turn from separation and strife, and learn to speak as one family:

OUR FATHER...