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CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL  
in the UNITED STATES

May 2019

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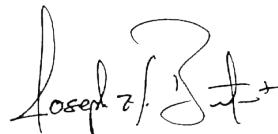
Dear Friends,

The devastating fire at Notre Dame Cathedral during Holy Week profoundly touched many lives. Perhaps in its loss, we lost something of ourselves—an emblem of the sense of possibility, aspiration and human dignity that Christians know as the New Creation given in the risen Christ.

Although Canterbury Cathedral may not be as architecturally pure as Notre Dame—it is after all quite an amalgam of architectural styles!—it nevertheless speaks just as powerfully to us of the human situation. In its case, what has impressed me most as a pilgrim to its precincts is the way the building wears the wounds of history so openly. From windows poked out by skeptical Puritans, to the floor medallion commemorating the Firewatchers of the Second World War, to the violence marked by the Martyrdom altar, it is a site where the tangible effects of human violence are visibly evident.

Perhaps this deeply human quality is a part of what draws people from so many backgrounds to Canterbury. It is a sacred place where the pain and struggle of daily life are brought into close proximity with a divine consolation and encouragement. In “showing people Jesus” (as the Cathedral’s mission statement puts it), it gathers up all that we human beings are into that holy embrace where all things have the possibility of being made new in Christ.

When I asked our high school youth group where they wanted to go on their senior pilgrimage, I was struck that they chose Canterbury. We had offered several suggestions—including the Lady of Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico, or the Taizé Community in France. But Canterbury cast an allure that attracted them more than any other place. I can only say that the Cathedral and the hospitality of its staff did not disappoint: it truly worked its magic on them, as it has on so many countless others.



Joseph Britton  
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