

## The Bishop's Address at the Memorial Service for Keith Bennett

Safely with their shepherd rest

We come today – drawn together within the cast of a long shadow of tragedy and grief – to glimpse a ray of light; to tinge our laments with memories that are joyful too and, despite the anguish of these terrible years, still to praise God for what has been good and needs to be cherished.

In that spirit we give thanks for Keith's young life, all too brief though it was. We surround Winnie, the family and friends, with our love, our support and our prayers. And, with them, we commend Keith into the hands of God – that, in the eternal care of the Good Shepherd, this lost sheep may forever safely rest.

The hills of Saddleworth Moor, for all their stark and awesome beauty, are the sombre backcloth for our act of memorial; but our words and worship lift us above and beyond to a Lord who, long ago upon another hill, had his life taken from him. As Father Ian most movingly expressed it during the private Requiem last week, Our Lord's Cross "is the sign that death will not win, evil will not prevail. God's love and kingdom will overcome."

Our Lord often spoke of his love of children: "Let them come to me" he said "and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." And he didn't mince his words about those who harm children. Truly God is their Judge.

Keith would have been 58 this year. So many years snatched away, so much that might have been – but his death can never destroy the preciousness of the God-given life that was shared with family and friends. The happy photo before us, and in our service sheets, evokes the joy of a cheerful lad, a kind boy who enjoyed the usual games and interests of the time; a son whom people warmed to and liked; and whose twelve years, lived to the full, were enfolded with love. For all that we give thanks and praise God.

Keith's murder – and that of Lesley Ann, Edward, John and Pauline – destroyed not only their lives; but, in a very real way, and agonising way, destroyed the lives of families too. That Keith's body has never been found must be a cruel blow for a mother to face – as indeed was not knowing for twenty years what had happened.

In this cathedral we pay public tribute to Winnie who has so longed for her eldest child to be found: never giving up hope, persevering, searching through hail, rain and snow; pitched past pitch of grief, at times wearied and overwhelmed - but never wholly bereft of comfort, thanks to the support of those who, through the years, have searched with Winnie, have got together with her and, thank God, even in those immeasurable depths of sorrow have had their moments of laughter too. And in a way that itself has been a gift from Keith; as well as Winnie's ever-present sense that Keith is always at her side. Love does not die.

It was St John Chrysostom, after whom the church where Keith went to Sunday School is named, who centuries back wrote these words about the loss of a child: "Think not, because he is not present that therefore he is lost...he has removed into a better country...to a happier inheritance."

This morning we commend Keith to that inheritance where crying and pain are no more and where God will wipe away every tear; we commend him to the Lord from whom no-one will ever snatch him, and by whom he is loved and cherished for ever; and we commend him to be part of the Great Story which no-one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

There may Keith safely with his shepherd rest.