

Bishop Crispian Hollis

THE NEWS

Easter Message

Although it's my pride and joy to be the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth, which gives me responsibility for Catholic communities as far apart as Jersey and the outskirts of Oxford, I also have commitments to the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, which involve me, in my capacity as Chairman of the Department for International Affairs, with Catholic communities overseas.

This doesn't mean so much getting involved in the murky world of international politics as getting alongside our Catholic brothers and sisters with support and solidarity in some of the most demanding of circumstances – in Iran, Iraq, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Visiting these people has filled me with admiration for the ways in which they are able to maintain their Christian faith with such courage and hope against all the odds.

In England we are able freely to enjoy our Easter feast. For us who are Christian, this is a time when we celebrate the rising of Jesus Christ from the dead after his devastating death on Good Friday. Easter Sunday is the most important day in the Christian calendar

For others, these days are a chance of a well-deserved break and a holiday as we all emerge from the darker days of winter into spring and early summer.

But whether we celebrate these days with Christian faith or not, whatever we do, we are able to do it in freedom, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

That's not true for the Christians in Iran, and being a Christian in Iraq today means being constantly in fear of death or abduction or, at least, heavy intimidation and persecution. In Zimbabwe, the people suffer from oppression, hunger and disease and from the capricious violence of a struggling dictatorship.

Yet, I know these embattled people will be celebrating Easter with strong faith and joy, which is wonderful. Join me in praying for them and in helping them in any way we can, so that Easter can be for them – and for us – a happy and blessed time.