***A message for the New Year, 2016.***

In the Church worldwide, New Year’s Day is celebrated as a day to pray for World Peace. The theme Pope Francis chose for this year is “Overcome indifference and win peace”. The events that we commemorate in 2016, the centenary of the Easter Rising and the on-going centenary of World War One, make it truly appropriate to think of both Ireland’s needs and the needs of the world and to pray for the peace and wellbeing of all people in Ireland and worldwide. Regarding the First World War this year recalls a most tragic battle, the Battle of the Somme. One historian summed up the Battle of the Somme as commencing on July 1st, lasting 100 days and involving 300.000 lives that were lost. Thousands of those lives were Irish.

Here in our diocese we recall that the first three to die in Easter 1916 were the three men who were drowned off Ballykissane Pier, near Killorglin, on the Good Friday. Seven days later, the Friday of Easter week, The O’ Rahilly from Ballylongford was killed in action in the centre of Dublin.

The centenary celebrations of Easter 1916 and all that followed it are important for us as a nation. Is it sufficiently long ago for us to honour all people and organisations from all sides who were involved? Can we respect all, refraining from judgement? We remember and honour the women and men who took up Ireland’s cause in 1916 as very precious to us because they started us on a path that led to our freedom. A century later we see ourselves as an independent, successful, sovereign nation. An important element of this is the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the hope for lasting peace and justice it contains.

When we recall 1916 the Easter Proclamation always comes to mind. So much of it could be quoted. I choose the following:

* The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, . . .
* We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God . . .
* In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline, and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

These quotes inspire many questions: What part does faith in “the Most High God” play in life in Ireland today? Are we still resolved to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation? What of our readiness to sacrifice ourselves of the common good?

Celebrating 1916 can evoke a renewal of commitment to the original vision. The values, the hopes and the ambitions of our people in 1916 and the values, the hopes and the ambitions of our people in the one hundred years since, will they inspire us afresh as we enter the second century after 1916?

In his recent Encyclical on the environment, ‘Laudato Si’, Pope Francis speaks of all people on earth as one human family with the world as our common home. We are aware of the difficulties and challenges facing our country as we come out of the recession. It has led to awful ongoing consequences for some people in particular. Are our economic difficulties manageable in comparison with the difficulties of many nations and peoples elsewhere in the world? We are aware of the pain and devastation caused by thirty years of ‘Troubles’ in Ireland: what must it be like for nations like Syria or Central African Republic or the Palestinian people suffering ongoing war and strife?

May commemorations throughout Ireland in the year ahead inspire us as a people to give of our best for our own people in Ireland and to open our hearts to world needs too. The great event we commemorate occurred at Easter, the highpoint of our annual celebration of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Thus the following words from the first letter of St. John are appropriate to conclude:

**This has taught us love - that He gave up his life for us; and we too, ought to give up our lives for our sisters and brothers. If a person who was rich enough in this world’s goods saw that one of their sisters or brothers was in need, but closed their heart to them, how could the love of God be living in that person? 1 Jn:14-18**

*Bishop Ray Browne Diocese of Kerry 1st January 2016*