

**Remarks by the Very Revd Shane Forster welcoming
His Majesty King Charles III to St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh**

Thursday, 25th May 2023

Your Majesty, it is a great honour to welcome you here today to the Hill of Armagh and to this ancient Cathedral Church. It is twenty-three years since your last visit to this holy place and we are delighted that you have chosen to return in this your Coronation year.

History records that it was on this site in the year 445 that Saint Patrick built his 'Great Stone Church' and he later ordained that this place would have pre-eminence over all the churches in Ireland. Hence, Armagh became the ecclesiastical capital of this island.

Over the centuries the Cathedral has been destroyed on at least seventeen occasions. There were numerous attacks and invasions by the Vikings, there were rebellions, and even a lightning strike in the 10th century that caused a great fire. Yet each generation of the community here in Armagh, in faith, took stock and rebuilt their Cathedral, to the glory of God.

The High King of Ireland, Brian Boru, recognised the importance of this place and he left a gift of gold on the altar. Following his death after the battle of Clontarf in 1014 he was buried here on the North side of the building.

So, the Hill of Armagh has a varied and interesting history with links to a saint and a King and to the many pilgrims and people of faith who have come to this sacred and shared space to pray over the centuries.

Armagh is unique in that it has two Cathedrals, both named after the patron saint of Ireland. Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral stands on the opposite hill, a place, Sir, you visited in 2019 and which this year celebrates the 150th anniversary of its dedication. There are also many other churches of different denominations here in the City and there exists among them good relationships and strong community links.

Today, in this holy place, the five current members of the Church Leaders Group (Ireland) will lead us in prayer. Their presence here and their shared work, witness and example are a model of good relationship, of vision and hope for the future of this land.

The Cathedral Choir, which is a choral foundation established by royal charter issued, Sir, by your predecessor and namesake King Charles I, on 23rd May 1634, as 'The College of King Charles in the Church of Saint Patrick in Armagh', will now sing the 'Irish Blessing' by Bob Chilcott.