

## **Poignant memories during a visit to York**

For those of a certain age they know what they were doing when they heard President John F. Kennedy had been shot, 55 years ago this month, on November 22, 1963.

For those a bit younger, Princess Diana's death in 1997 or the September 11, 2001 attacks are similarly engrained in the memory.

Meanwhile, on a personal level, we might recall the place and date of special events; where and when we got engaged for example.

I am in York as I write this, resisting the urge to paint their unfinished roses red.

It was in York five years ago in October that whilst going to the consecration of Julian Henderson to be the new Bishop of Blackburn that I learnt from my father that my mother was dying.

As soon as the service had finished I found a train and headed home. A couple of weeks later, on October 30 she died. This means my being in York on her anniversary gives to me a peculiar mixture of emotions and memories.

November the First is All Saints day.

It is the day the church remembers the countless ordinary Christians who have gone before us. 'Seeing we are surrounded by so great a host of witnesses' is one of my favourite quotes from the letter to the Hebrews in the Bible.

These can often be 'unsung heroes' or ones who, whilst held dear by those communities shaped by them, their memory has been lost through the years.

(When I was Rector of Standish I found it comforting to know that the church had been there 800 years and had had 42 previous rectors before me, now mostly unknown beyond their names. All part of that community of saints.)

The following day is more personal, 'All Souls Day' when we specifically remember those who are close to us, who have directly had an impact on our lives and with whom we are still emotionally bound.

It is a more sombre day as our memories can still be tinged with grief and loss, even if they are mainly happy memories and even if we hold to a faith in the resurrection and eternal life.

Hence feeling a little strange as I write this in York on my mother's anniversary.

All Saints and All Souls help Christians remember that we are not isolated individuals. We are not alone but are part of a community that extends beyond the immediate place and people whom we are with today. It includes those dear to us and those whom we never knew.

Next week we will find ourselves remembering specifically those who died in warfare, this week it is more homely but just as poignant.