

NOTTINGHAM

Indi, a funeral that speaks of Heaven

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What is Heaven really, to be in the arms of God? A dream that consoles us in the face of a loss too painful to bear? Or the Hope that comes from the certainty of a life changed by Christ? It is the question that came back powerfully as I attended Indi Gregory's solemn funeral yesterday morning, 1 December, in a chilly Nottingham, in the packed cathedral. The eight-month-old girl, suffering from a serious genetic disease, who was

denied the chance to live until her natural death by doctors and judges, and then allowed to die on 13 November, saw her dignity, which had been denied her in life, recognised yesterday in her final farewell.

Not only because her parents Dean and Claire brought her to the church in a white carriage drawn by two horses, the small white coffin wrapped in wreaths of flowers. But above all because of the solemnity of the funeral liturgy that the bishop of Nottingham himself, Patrick McKinney, wanted to celebrate, accompanying Dean and Claire to several meetings before the funeral. The atmosphere of prayer, the songs performed by the cathedral choir, the care of the bishop and concelebrants, and the readings chosen, by Dean and Claire together with Monsignor McKinney: all spoke of Heaven.

"**He reserves a special place in Heaven for all children,**" said Bishop McKinney, "and especially for those who, like Indi, die so young. We believe this because Jesus himself told us so in the chosen Gospel page: 'Let the children come to me (...) for to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven' (a passage also recalled in the message sent for the occasion by Pope Francis). And St Paul's letter to the Romans: 'If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord; so that whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.' Dean and Claire," the bishop concluded, "are greatly comforted by this truth that Jesus Christ will continue to care for Indi in heaven."

And yesterday, with the utmost naturalness, in the beautiful letter he wrote and read by the cathedral pastor at the end of the funeral liturgy, Dean Gregory reiterated the concept: "My greatest comfort, in this difficult time, is knowing where Indi is now and who he is with. I had Indi baptised to protect her and so that she could go to heaven. It gives me peace to know that she is in heaven and that God is taking care of her."

But again the question comes back: what makes it possible to say that this is not a dream to take refuge in, but a certain hope? Dean and Claire answered with their own lived experience. **Indi's father himself told the *Compass* exclusively:** 'I am not religious and I am not baptised. But when I was in court I felt as if I had been dragged to hell. I thought that if hell exists, then heaven must also exist. It was as if the devil was there. I thought that if the devil exists then God must exist'.

Already, neither Dean nor Claire knew anything about religion, much less Christianity, but experiencing reality with an open gaze put an evidence in front of them. Thus they were able to see for themselves that while on the one hand there is 'a system so strong that it is impossible to overcome it', as Dean mentioned in his letter, on the

other hand they were able to meet men who live in a completely different way, who convey humanity: the Anglican volunteer at the hospital who baptised Indi, Christian Concern's lawyers ('They struck me very much for how they supported me and for their dedication,' Dean had told La Bussola), the wave of solidarity that rose from all over the world, and especially from Italy, which, in fact, had an important presence at the funeral yesterday.

It will be recalled that on 6 November the Italian government had granted Italian citizenship to Indi, in order to facilitate her eventual transfer to the Bambin Gesù Hospital in Rome, where she could have been treated, something that the British judges prevented: 'I am sure Indi is as proud as I am,' said Dean, 'for the amazing support and love shown by the Italian government, the Italian prime minister and the Italian people. I firmly believe that they have been Indi's guardian angels during the legal battle'.

And indeed, yesterday the Italian government delegation was present, with Ministers Roccella and Locatelli (Prime Minister Meloni then sent a beautiful personal message to Dean and Claire); former Senator Simone Pillon, who as a lawyer looked after the Gregorys' interests in Italy and who together with the Pro Vita e Famiglia delegation gave Dean and Claire two books with the messages and drawings of the many Italians who wanted to show solidarity; and CitizenGo as well as Bussola, of course.

B **Dean called her)** there were also other faces who over the years have fought for life in England against an inhuman system that judges death as 'the best interest' of its severely disabled citizens. So there was **Hollie Dance, the mother of Archie Battersbie**, the 12-year-old 'condemned to death' for severe brain damage following a fall on the challenge; **RS's sister (a court order still prevents his name from being published)** who had fought hard to snatch her brother, a Polish citizen in a vegetative state, from the death decreed by doctors and judges; and there was also **Isabel Vaughan-Spruce**, arrested twice for silently praying near abortion clinics. They all came from afar to join Dean and Claire, but also to reaffirm the meaning of their suffering.

A gathering of great symbolic value, a visible unity of people who for the love of life and Truth found themselves fighting against the lies and cynicism of an increasingly totalitarian Power. And it is significant that this unity was shown in a liturgy glorifying the Lord of Life. It is also through these faces of people wounded but never dome, that the hope of Heaven becomes concrete.