

Capuchin Provincial Minister's Address
on the Occasion of the unveiling of Plaque commemorating Four Courts
Garrison,
Church St., December 7, 2016

Ard Mhéara, a dhaoine uaisle,

The Capuchin friars in Church St., as you all know, played a significant role during and in the aftermath of the Rising during Easter Week 1916. This is a remarkable story of how of a small group of friars provided pastoral care to the combatants and to the injured and bereaved, but also played a crucial role in bringing about an end to the hostilities. It is fitting that as we have been marking the centenary of the Rising this year, we remember the events that happened on this street. We are standing here today in the shadow of the Capuchin Friary Church on the one hand and the Fr. Mathew Hall on the other. As the Rebellion began and continued throughout that fateful week in 1916, Irish volunteers based in the Four Courts also took a post here while the British Army had a post up the Street in North King Street. The Friary, Church and Hall were caught right in the middle of the action.

On the Easter Monday, shortly after 10am, the Feis Maitiú Irish dancing competition had just begun with many parents and children present here when the fighting began. It's no great wonder then, that the first child-casualty of the Rising was killed in crossfire, while being wheeled in his pram by his mother just outside the Church here. His name was Sean Foster (2 years). His mother and the friars carried his body to the friary and in the ensuing confusion, the friars were on site to offer what assistance they could. As the situation became clearer and more fighting was expected the first thing that needed to happen was to safely evacuate the people from the Hall, which was done.

The friars here then became involved in the Easter week events of 1916 at every level: some provided spiritual solace to the Volunteers engaged in the conflict at the barricades and some provided practical assistance to those who were injured, many of whom were first treated in the Fr. Mathew Hall. To whatever degree the Hall was used as a volunteer post, for the friars, it became primarily a first-aid post, a field hospital, so to speak, where the friars spent much of their time, helping in any way they could and indeed, in spite of concerns for their own safety, they also helped carry the more seriously injured to the Richmond Hospital, where they also ministered.

All the friars known to have played an active role during Easter Week 1916 e.g. Augustine Hayden, Aloysius Travers (Provincial) and Columbus Murphy (all of whom with others ministered to the leaders before their executions in Kilmainham) attest in their memoirs to the fact that though the Hall was taken over by the volunteers, it acted as a first aid post and was used as a hospital where the friars and members of Cumann na mBan attended the injured. Fr. Aloysius himself attests that he was in charge of the wounded here and the friars were constantly present, taking turns at ministering to the injured in whatever way they could.

One of the most significant parts of Fr. Augustine's Recollections of the Rising concerns what happened here on Friday April 28th (1916). I read from the memoir itself:

"On Friday [28 April] activity in the city became more intense and machine gun fire was heard more frequently. More wounded were brought to the **Father Mathew Hall** and the English snipers were busy. Some shots from the direction of Smithfield pierced some of our windows and shattered a stair at the Smithfield end of our top corridor in the Friary....

The English were gradually closing in on us and two of the Fathers remained in the **Father Mathew Hall** this Friday night [28 April] to attend to the wounded and be on the spot for further possible eventualities....

On Saturday morning [29 April] things had become more serious, and British soldiers had succeeded in taking possession of some houses on both sides of North King Street. After early Mass and a hasty breakfast I relieved the two Fathers in the **Father Mathew Hall** and remained there the whole day. There were a couple of bad cases and we had no Doctor up to the present. About three o'clock in the afternoon, when the military were already firing from the barricade at the **Hall**, I sent Micheál Foghludha, under a white flag, to secure one if at all possible. As he did not return, after about an hour or so I suspected something untoward had happened, and sent a young fellow named Doyle, with a white flag and a Red Cross one, to see the Colonel [Taylor] in charge to give him a letter I had written. In this I explained that I was a Capuchin priest, **that the Hall was being used as a hospital, that I was there in charge of the wounded**, and that, under the circumstances, I asked the favour of an interview. Having seen the Colonel at the barricade, after some considerable delay, he brought back to me the oral answer he had received and delivered it to me in words that I shall never forget. "He said, Father, that we were all rebels and outlaws and that we would get none of the amenities of war". ...

The friars (Fathers) were just finishing supper as I entered the Refectory about 6.20 p.m. and after I had told them briefly what had transpired during the afternoon and what I was now about to do to prevent slaughter, Father Aloysius [Travers OFM Cap.], who was then

Provincial, at once volunteered to accompany me. With a warm 'God-speed' from the rest of the community we returned to the **Hall** and, accompanied by Doyle, who bore a white flag, we proceeded to the barricade at North King Street and asked to see the Colonel. I told the Colonel what I had already written him, that **we were using the Father Mathew Hall as a hospital**, that there were several serious cases there, and that we asked for a truce not only to look after our wounded properly, but also - I felt was playing my trump card - to hand over two English soldiers who were detained there as prisoners. To our astonishment he replied not a word, but turning abruptly to the officers near him, he consulted for a short time, and then left without having spoken a word to us.

[A truce was subsequently arranged] ...

We loitered about for a while chatting to the Volunteers and then went down to the **Father Mathew Hall** to give all there the news. Arrangements were made for the transfer of the serious cases to the Richmond Hospital and those who wished, nurses and patients, were told they could go home." (Recollections of the Rising, Fr. Augustine Hayden OFM Cap)

Friends, you can hear from this account something of the tumultuous events that took place on this spot over a 100 years ago today.

As we rightly honour the men and women of the Four Courts Garrison, who helped secure our freedom, by the unveiling of this plaque today, may we remember and pray too for all those caught up in these events: those who were injured, families who were bereaved, members of the Volunteers and British forces, the Capuchin friars and those who sought to bring first aid, comfort and solace to all those affected by the happenings on this site.

On behalf of the Capuchin friars, I feel rightly proud of the friars of that time who remained true to their commitment to stand by the people in all their struggles. They continue to inspire us friars of today to be ever true to our calling as "brothers of the people."

Br. Adrian Curran OFM Capuchin
Provincial Minister

December 7th 2016