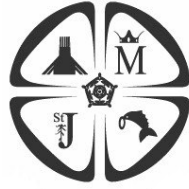


LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESAN CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION



Introduction to Mass and homily preached by the Most Reverend Patrick Kelly, Archbishop of Liverpool, at a Mass of Thanksgiving on the occasion of his Episcopal Silver Jubilee. Friday 3 April 2009 at 5.30 pm in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool.

Introduction to Mass:

'Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen' (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Thank you for setting aside this time to be one with me in giving all glory and honour to the Father who has accomplished abundantly far more than all I have asked or imagined in the last 25 years. It has always been and increasingly been clear to me that this must be my charter. 'For we do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake'. (2 Corinthians 4-5). And this Cathedral in crown, glass, bronze, is the perfect setting for: 'we proclaim Christ crucified'. (1 Corinthians, 1:2-3). That is why, with Holy Week upon us, our thanksgiving and reflections shall be formed by the Scriptures appointed to be read at Mass on the Friday before Palm Sunday. All our knowing and deciding and loving should be about 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'. That our praise may be fitting, sincere, as in our name the choir sing the Kyrie, that we may fittingly celebrate the sacred mysteries we acknowledge our sins.

Homily:

One day I went away from Jerusalem across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptised. For many years the loving wisdom, wisest love, generous love, calling for praise to the holiest in the height and in the depth be praise, told us in our Lord's baptism had made a searching claim on my heart and mind. But, somehow, visits to the Jordan river, flowing slowly, sluggish, meandering, had not thrilled me. But one day, across the Jordan we came to Elijah's spring: a cauldron of three surging, bubbling, powerful springs. No wonder Saint John in his Gospel wrote: 'John was baptising at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there'. (John.3:23) And so different from the waters I had seen at Kashan when visiting our sisters and brothers in the so tiny Catholic Church in Iran. There a genius had designed waters so to flow that while it was abundant, its surface was so still fish dancing in its depths are clearly seen.

But the waters at Elijah's, at John's spring across the Jordan are a surging menace: a battering force: death dealing not just life.

And there Jesus had been baptised, I am sure: and that place is my whole life as priest, as bishop: for in that place Jesus did not stand safe, aloof, at a distance from us sinners: in all that shatters, batters, kills life in abundance. But true to being for us sinners, Emmanuel, in man, not only for man, the agony in man for man would undergo. As we will ponder a week today: this Son of God did not by a word of authority, by a gesture of power, deal with our sins: 'he was wounded for our transgressions and upon him was the punishment that makes us whole: stricken for the transgressions of his people: he bore the sins of many'.

On the eve of Holy Week he went back to that place: many came to him there, as we do tonight: and in Holy Week we know: 'everything that John said about this man was true'. And what John said was: Behold, the Lamb of God. Not, behold the lion; no: behold the Lamb: and John testified: I saw the Holy Spirit come down and overshadow him in the form of a dove: a dove not an eagle.

Twenty-five years ago, at the laying on of hands by Bishop Thomas Holland, with Archbishop Derek Worlock on his right and Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville on his left, hundreds prayed that the same Spirit would overshadow me: to form in me a mind and heart and feelings and attitude, never to stand aloof, safe, untroubled on the bank: never to speak from a distance claiming an authority or power that has not been tested and formed by entering into the seething cauldron of all that stands in the way of life in abundance.

I must one day give an account as to whether I have tried to keep all those to whom I am sent faithful followers of the Lamb who was slain: in particular I know the Spirit is with me to encourage priests and deacons to be open to the Spirit who plunges them into the joys and hopes the sorrows and sadness of God's own holy people.

I am certain: the ecumenical journey, so fittingly affirmed in the monument to Bishop David Sheppard and Archbishop Derek Worlock in Hope Street, cannot be accomplished from a distance: but only in shared prayer, mutual struggling with the word of God, friendship in the Lord.

And we cannot bear life in abundance unless in Nugent Care, in painstaking involvement in the economic, commercial, legal, penal, civic life of city, country. world, we are plunged into its complexity, not on the bank, safe, aloof, terrible in denunciation and rebuke so that all despair.

But true to the words that began Lent and that come to their awesome climax in the events of Holy Week, words true of him, to be reflected in us: 'For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'.

It is so clear: for such wonders 'Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour are yours almighty Father for ever and ever'.

3 April 2009