



APOSTOLIC VISITATION TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ARMAGH
SERVICE OF PENITENCE AND HEALING
CARDINAL MURPHY-O'CONNOR

23 January 2011, St Patrick's Cathedral, Archdiocese of Armagh

Words of Introduction by Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor

I am here today at the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI. He wishes, as do I, a time for prayer for the outpouring of God's mercy and, through the Holy Spirit the gift of holiness and strength for the Church in this diocese. The Holy Father has expressed his deep sadness about the grievous wound of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults in the Church in Ireland.

Today we listen to the Holy Father as he speaks to victims, families, parents and young people as well as priests and bishops. Most especially he speaks to survivors, recognising their suffering and his sorrow.

After this we will hear a reflection from Baroness Sheila Hollins, who together with Mgr Mark O'Toole, have been assisting me in this Visitation.

Then Cardinal Brady and I will wash the feet of a number of people as a sign of humility and the service of others.

I invite you to pray for the outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit at this time. We remember the words of the Psalmist

"Have mercy on me Lord in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence
O God you will not spurn a humbled contrite heart In your goodness show favour to Sion -
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem".

Reflection by Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor

One of my favourite passages in the Gospel of St. Luke is the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection of the Lord. As they walk a stranger comes and walks with them. The two disciples are sad and downcast, they have fled from Jerusalem, a place of pain and broken dreams and lost hopes. There is a sense of betrayal of their own faith in the Messiah. No wonder they want to go back to the normal and familiar and to things as they were. But there is no normal anymore. There is no going back for they will always remember the pain and loss, and the unspoken memory of their crucified Lord.

Many people feel the same here in this diocese and in Ireland today.

There is a sense of betrayal and being in a place of pain and most especially of the pain and the damage of those who have been abused.

Many are downcast and sad. There are broken dreams and lost hopes and an awareness that things will never be the same again.

The stranger joins the two disciples and walks with them and invites them to tell the story from their point of view. He then tells them that the death of Jesus Christ is part of God's plan. He retells the story that they had believed in. He teaches them to live again in faith. From this Jesus teaches them, that from the experience of loss and shame, how they are to find the Gospel of Life. He tells them that there is another road that the Risen Lord is now walking. It is a road of suffering, confusion, a road the Lord carves out of our failures, our sins and our mistakes which lead not to emptiness but to Him.

His disciples invite the stranger to stay with them and he stays and they break bread together and, it is only then they recognise him as Jesus the Lord. Immediately they recognise him, he disappears. As they continue on their journey, they say to one another: 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?'

During these past two weeks I have heard many voices: the voices of great pain and suffering of the survivors of abuse; their shame; their anger. I have also heard voices of discouragement; voices of honesty and the integrity of the people and good priests. I have also heard voices of faith and a determination to persevere in the building up of the Church in this diocese by prayer and the holy Eucharist and the Word of God and the service of others. Above all, I have listened to the voices of hope. First of all, the voice of hope that the past will not be forgotten and that there will be openness and transparency in facing the issues of abuse. There is too the hope that there will be renewal in this diocese and an assurance of the presence of the Lord as we walk along this road.

You are travelling on the same road as those two disciples. The revelation of child abuse and the failures at so many levels make it a hard road. I think that we can have confidence that the Lord is with us on the road we are travelling. There is joy in resurrection.

Jesus is talking to you and me just as he talked to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He calls and invites us and sends us out again in His name: "Did not our hearts burn within us as he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us".

We thank you Lord for all the blessings you have given to us and we ask you to continue to bless us as we walk on our pilgrimage here on earth and at the end, to bring us to the joy of our heavenly home.