

## PLYMOUTH CATHEDRAL

### SERMON AT EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF RT REV MARK O'TOOLE

28 January 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May I begin by saying that I know your new bishop, Mark O'Toole, is very much looking forward to being with you here in the diocese of Plymouth. He is extremely well qualified to be your bishop. He has worked in a parish; he has taught theology at a seminary where he was Dean of Studies; he became Rector of the Seminary later on and he was my secretary for six years, poor man! He knows, and I know, he will receive a great welcome from all of you priests and people. He is aware that bishops here live a long time. Two former bishops were with you, I understand, for well over sixty years, so he is ready for a long haul. It is good that my friend, Bishop Christopher will still be around, even though we might have to go to the Scilly Isles to get hold of him. But there is so much in this diocese to celebrate. You have your saints whom you reverence: St. Boniface, St. Cuthbert Mayne and so many others whose names are written in the towns and villages of your counties. Bishop Mark has never been to Plymouth before but he loves the sea because his parents came from an island called Lettermore in the West of Ireland so were brought up looking at the ocean. So I think Bishop Mark will have plenty of opportunity to do that because there are 300 miles of it in your diocese. It is very good that Bishop Mark's mother is here today and we rejoice with her at today's celebration.

Talking of celebrations, I note that when the Holy Father, Pope Francis wrote to the new cardinals – and may I say I am delighted that our new cardinal-to-be, Archbishop Vincent Nichols, is here today; we are very happy about the honour done to him and to the Church in our country – he told them that they should receive the news of their appointment with joy, but that the celebrations should not have anything 'contrary to the evangelical spirit of austerity and sobriety'. And when I next see Pope Francis I am going to whisper in his ear that they do things just a little bit differently in Plymouth!

The three readings that have been chosen today were chosen by Bishop Mark himself and they are not only an indication of the life and work of a bishop but perhaps, above all, there is contained in them a plea for your prayers and your support that he may become the kind of bishop that you want and that the diocese needs. In the Book of Kings we heard the young Solomon say to

the Lord, “Lord, I am a young man, unskilled in leadership. Give me a heart to understand how to govern your people.” Pope Benedict, or rather The Bishop Emeritus of Rome as we should correctly call him, once was talking about the many deserts in our world: the deserts of poverty, hunger and thirst, abandonment and loneliness. Then he said there is also a desert of God's darkness; the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life; the external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast. But then he added, “We, however, have another measure, the Son of God, the true Man, He is the measure for true humanity, the criterion for discerning between the true and the false, between deception and truth. We must mature in this adult faith and it is towards this faith that we must lead the flock of God.” This is the task of your new bishop. He must lead you to that mature faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God because it is only in Him that we discern what is true and what is false, what is the purpose of our living, the One who gives hope and meaning to our lives. “Give me a heart to understand how to govern your people,” says Solomon. Solomon notes that it is not just a mind or intelligence that you need to govern, you also need a heart to discern how to govern, what are the needs of your people, how to refresh them, how to be with them, how to lead them. Bishop Mark is asking for your prayers that the good Lord will give him something of the quality of leadership that a bishop needs to guide his people and to govern them with wisdom, mercy and with love.

In the second reading we have a plea, again, for your prayers and support. “We hold this treasure,” says St. Paul, “in earthenware jars.” What is that treasure? “The treasure,” says Paul, “is Christ, the glory of God who is the image of God. It is Christ whom we proclaim as the Lord and ourselves as his servants for Jesus's sake.” So a bishop is someone who is, in the first place, a minister of the Word, preaching the Good News of the Gospel in season and out of season. He must always see that the Gospel is good news, that it is new, fresh, so that people may experience something of the joy of the gospel and what a privilege and grace it is to be a Christian – to be a Catholic. The bishop will also be the first minister of the sacraments, above all feeding them the Bread of Life in the Holy Eucharist as well as in the other sacraments. We pray today that Bishop Mark will always receive the grace to be a faithful preacher of the Word, a faithful minister of the sacraments and will lead by example the priests and people of his diocese.

We had then that lovely passage in St. John's gospel when the Lord says to Peter, “Do you love me more than they do?” He says it three times and Peter says, “You know all things, you know I love you.” “Feed my sheep.” If there is one thing that a bishop wishes above everything else, it is to be a good shepherd, to know his sheep and for them to know him. I was very interested to read of Pope Francis's words to Papal Nuncios about the kind of bishop-to-be that they should choose. He

said, “Be careful that the candidates are pastors close to the people, fathers and brothers, that they are gentle, patient and merciful, animated by inner poverty, the freedom of the Lord and also by simplicity and austerity of life.” And he goes on, “Above all, the bishop must watch over the flock, to keep watch, to imbue hope, that they have the sun and light in their hearts to lovingly support the plans God has for his people.”

My dear friends, it is with great confidence that today I commend Bishop Mark to you who I know will be the kind of bishop Pope Francis is speaking of. He comes to a great diocese with a great tradition. You may be confident that you are receiving a bishop who, indeed, will watch over the flock and imbue hope, that you will have the sun and light in your hearts to lovingly support the plan God has for His people. Today we pray for Bishop Mark and for his ministry in the years ahead, that it will be fruitful in ways that are beyond all our expectations. “Do you love me more than these?” said the Lord to Peter. “Lord, you know all things, you know I love you.” “Feed my sheep.”

**+ Cormac Card. Murphy-O'Connor**

*Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster*