

# INSTALLATION OF BISHOP THOMAS BURNS AS BISHOP OF MENEVIA

## CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST JOSEPH, SWANSEA

MONDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2008

### HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

#### INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a very great privilege for me being here with you this morning to preach at this Installation Mass of the eleventh Bishop of Menevia in succession to your beloved Bishop Mark Jabalé who now quietly moves into retirement.

Your new Bishop brings with him to your Diocese a lifetime's experience of service: Initially being ordained to the Priesthood on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971 as a member of the Society of Mary; having served for almost 25 years of ministry in the Forces, first of all as a naval chaplain, then as principal chaplain and vicar general; and now over the past six years as the Bishop of the Forces since his Episcopal Ordination on 18 June 2002.

As Bishop of the Forces, Bishop Tom has endeared himself to the hierarchies of both England and Wales and Scotland and has undertaken on behalf of the hierarchies extremely valuable work with the Apostleship of the Sea. I know too that the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust (HCPT) has and will benefit from his ministry with a £1.00 fine being paid to HCPT from anyone who addresses him as 'My Lord' or 'His Lordship'!

I now remind him of the instruction given when he was ordained as a Bishop; I share with him some thoughts on the readings from Scripture which he has chosen for this Mass; and I try to point him on the way ahead in his new role as Bishop of Menevia aware of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and of the pastoral guidance of both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

#### THE ROLE OF A BISHOP:

I ask Bishop Tom to think back initially to the instruction outline in our **Solemn Liturgy for the Ordination of a Bishop**. This instruction reminds a Bishop of the role which is his and of the principal matters to which he must attend:

"In the person of the bishop, with his priests around him, Jesus Christ, the Lord, who became High Priest forever, is present among you. Through the ministry of the bishop, Christ Himself continues to proclaim the Gospel and to confer the mysteries of faith on those who believe".

The **readings from Sacred Scripture** chosen by Tom indicates something of his own realism as he accepts this particular office in the Church, **an office which implies service for the rest of his life to the priests and people of Menevia**.

The Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaiah reminds us of those wonderful words of the prophet, and later used by Jesus, indicating that he has received the spirit of God – that spirit given to bring "good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken".

Paul in his letter to the Romans in the passage chosen by Bishop Tom described as "a hymn to God's love" reminds in a special way a bishop that nothing on this earth or beyond life on this earth "can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus Our Lord".

The realism in the life of a bishop is spelled out in words from St John's Gospel when every Christian is reminded that because of their way of life, because that way is so often in contradiction

to that of the world, they will often be hated by the world as Christ Himself was similarly hated and eventually persecuted and put to death.

I also call on Bishop Tom to think carefully about the role of the bishop not only within his own Diocese of Menevia but to the Universal Church. In the decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church of the Second Vatican Council, we are reminded that: "Bishops, as legitimate successors of the apostles and members of the Episcopal College, should appreciate that they are closely united to each other and should be **solicitous for all the Churches**".

That indeed is emphasised in the equally important decree on the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" where it is stated:

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts....that is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history".

Bishop Tom – continue your ministry of reaching out personally and leading your people to reach out to a greater awareness of those joys and hopes, griefs and anguishes of the peoples of our time both here in Wales, in the United Kingdom, and throughout the world.

### **THE LIVING OUT BY BISHOP TOM OF HIS LIFE AS A BISHOP:**

However what is equally important to consider today is **how has this Bishop to whom the Pope has entrusted the Diocese of Menevia already lived out his life with and for his people.**

First of all Bishop Tom has had considerable achievements as **Bishop of the Forces**. There is no doubt that throughout the whole of his tenure Defence Forces have been involved in high intensity operations both in Iraq and latterly in Afghanistan, to say nothing of the Balkans and Africa where our service men and women have encountered and had to function in the midst of humanity diminished. Our young people, that is those within the armed services, are probably the group within society which, at this time, find themselves most relentlessly in harms way and exposed to death and serious injuries. It is upon them, as upon all the youth of the world, that the mission of witnessing God's purpose in this complex world is increasingly placed. Bishop Tom has kept them always in his heart and in his hands. He has unceasingly spoken out for them – for their welfare, for the support of service people's families and the quality of the housing in which they live, and for the protection of soldiers in terms of the quality of their personal equipment and vehicles. He has, on occasion, had media criticism levelled against him for speaking out but he had gladly borne that without demur and is admired for having the courage to say what needed to be said. This is indeed believed to have been one of his most substantial achievements. Now that Bishop Tom is freed from the constraints and protocols as Bishop of the Forces, he might even become a greater thorn in the side of the Ministry of Defence..... It should also be added that we must remember his contribution to the final stages of "emancipation" within the Chaplaincies of the three Services where, we have now delivered the right for Catholic chaplains to compete on merit for the appointments of Deputy Chaplain General and Chaplain General of the Army and their equivalents in the other two Services. This work is unfinished in its implementation as Bishop Tom leaves his present appointment but his contribution has shaped the future and opened the way.

In addition to his work within the Diocese of the Forces Bishop Tom has also added substantial value to two other areas of the apostolate at the request of the Bishops Conferences of England and Wales and that of Scotland. He was charged with oversight of the workings of the **Apostleship of the Sea** along with Bishop Peter Moran, the Bishop of Aberdeen in Scotland. The Apostleship of the Sea involves chaplaincy services and spiritual and temporal work and activity throughout the ports and coasts of the United Kingdom. There the Apostleship of the Sea offers help, support and sacramental and pastoral care to seafarers. Bishop Tom has served this organisation with distinction.

## **TEACHING OF THE POPES:**

It was here in **Wales on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1982 that Pope John Paul II** reminded the people of Wales – bishops, priests and people – of the strengths which Christ has given to each and everyone in the sacraments. But he also added in Cardiff:

“There is something very closely linked to the sacraments that I have celebrated, something that is very much a part of the Gospel message, something that is essential to your Christian lives. It is prayer. Prayer is so important that Jesus Himself tells us – pray constantly”.

**In his message to the people of Scotland on that same visit Pope John Paul II** indicated the difficulties facing the Christian at that time – some 26 years ago he spelled out that it was harder to follow Christ than appears to have been the case before. He stressed that witnessing to Christ in modern life means a daily contest. And he added that: “As believers, we are constantly exposed to pressures by modern society which would compel us to conform to the standards of this secular age, substitute new priorities, restrict our aspirations at risk of compromising our Christian conscience”.

As a bishop, Bishop Tom is one who must root his life in prayer as he realises the difficulties of you his people in following Christ at this present time when witnessing to Christ means as the Pope says “a daily contest” and when at times there are so many risks of each one of us compromising our Christian conscience.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Bishop Tom - you have already faced many challenges in your life – as Bishop of Menevia you will indeed be called to face more challenges as you continue your ongoing role of service of God and of your people.

As a prayerful person you will indeed bear witness by your own life to the priests, religious and people for whom you are now responsible in the Diocese of Menevia. You are called upon to witness to the love of Jesus Christ for the people of your Diocese, and through that witness help to make Christ evermore present in a world which is so often helplessly crying out for the presence and the love of Jesus evermore strongly in our midst.

I conclude with words of Pope Benedict XVI in his document: ‘The Sacrament of Love’ of February 2007: “Let us encourage one another to walk joyfully, our hearts filled with wonder, towards our encounter with the Holy Eucharist, so that we may experience and proclaim to others the truth of the words with which Jesus took leave of his disciples: ‘Lo, I am with you always, until the end of the world’”.