



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

International Mass of Thanksgiving for the Election of Pope Francis

Archbishop Nichols' Homily

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL, FRIDAY, 3 MAY 2013

This evening we gather here in this Cathedral to give thanks to God for our new Holy Father, Pope Francis. Together with so many from Latin America, we thank God for this gift to the Church from Argentina! We rejoice with the people of that country that a son of your nation has been entrusted with this great office, in service of the world's Catholics and for the whole of the human family.

This evening we pray for Pope Francis. No one should be under any illusion about the burden of responsibility that he now carries. But we know that he is prepared for this unique ministry. Already his words and deeds display a deep relationship with Christ our Lord, a relationship of trust and love. We know his long years as a Jesuit priest have instilled in him a love of prayer, a practice of contemplation, a profound study of the riches of the Church. As Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires he showed resilience and dedication, especially to the plight of the poorest and is much loved by so many.

In accepting the office of the Successor of St Peter, he has paid a high price. I cannot help thinking about the return ticket to Buenos Aires which was in his pocket. It will never be used. Now he is a man for the whole world, a father in every nation, an advocate for the poor, the needy and the oppressed in every country. Now he belongs to us all. And for this we thank God. And we owe to Pope Francis the support of our love and prayers.

He describes himself as 'a man from the ends of the earth' for he has made a long, long journey to the Shoes of the Fisherman. It is not surprising, then, that one of the images often used by Pope Francis is that of life as a journey, a pilgrimage, to be walked together, to be walked always in the company of Jesus.

This evening we have heard again words spoken by Jesus which we know so well.

He said: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.'

As we make our journey through life, these are words which we must ponder deeply.

Jesus says 'I am the Way.' Yes, he points out the way we are to walk, the pathway we are to choose. There are so many roads open before us, some seemingly full of promise, others bringing us to hardship. Walking with Jesus is always the Way to go.

Jesus says 'I am the truth.' Yes, we journey in a world where many claim to speak the truth of a situation, and where others say there is no such thing as objective truth, only your truth and my truth. Amid these confusions, Jesus is the Truth. He is not a theory, nor a political movement. He is the truth of God, the creator of all things, come in our flesh so that we may not simply come to understand the truth written into our nature, but we may embrace and love that truth in the person of Jesus.

Jesus also says 'I am the life.' In moments of honesty we know there are many things we cannot do for ourselves. In Him we come to the source of life, of energy, of goodness that takes us beyond the limitations of ourselves. Jesus offers us new life in his mercy and forgiveness. He opens for us the possibility of a new start, in a society where that is increasingly difficult to find. Most of all, Jesus reaches beyond the reality of death, something way beyond our reach, and opens for us the fullness of eternal life!

Pope Francis has vivid ways of expressing these truths.

He says, for example, that if we follow the Way of Jesus we will give a pride of place in our journey to the poor and the needy. Embracing, not rejecting, the poor is an essential part of the Way.

He says that if we follow Jesus, the Truth, then we will understand that through every experience Jesus is preparing us for our final happiness and our meeting with his heavenly Father. To us our suffering may seem pointless, our distress totally empty, our loneliness just unbearable. But seen in the light of the Truth they are ways in which the Lord prepares our minds, our eyes and our hearts for the ultimate prize, the sight and experience of his glory.

Pope Francis says that if we follow Jesus who is the Life then we will understand that it is far greater to give than to receive, that in generosity towards others we are truly enriched and that, in the end, it is through dying that we come to the eternal life for which we have been created.

Pope Francis stands now in a long tradition of the Successors of the Apostle Peter. Today we keep the Feast of James, who like Peter, was given leadership in the early Church, James in Jerusalem, Peter in Rome and universally. This successor of Peter inherits his same task: that of giving voice, with authority, to the truth of faith. He is one to whom we offer our respect and obedience, to his Office and to his person.

And today, in this Mass, we seek to renew within ourselves a generous responsiveness to his call. His is a voice in the world today calling for qualities which are essential for our wellbeing: humility rather than pride before others; service rather than seeking power; honesty rather than manipulation; mercy rather than retribution; recognition of wrong-doing rather than a pretence of grandeur.

All of these qualities, being called for by our Holy Father Pope Francis, are so important in every sphere of our lives, at home, in business, among friends and in public life too. And they are the very qualities that will open our hearts to God, to our heavenly Father who so much wants to draw us to himself and to the glory and the happiness for which we have been made.

May God bless the Pope from Argentina. May God bless Pope Francis. May God bless us all with his mercy and peace that we may serve him all our days. Amen.

+ Vincent Nichols

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