



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Homily: Rite of Election

Archbishop Bernard Longley, Birmingham

HOMILY, 9 MARCH 2014

The time has come...and the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

In the name of the Church I am very happy to welcome you to St Chad's Cathedral, the Mother Church of our diocese, for this moment of election as we begin the season of Lent. At the conclusion of these forty days of Lent, as we celebrate Easter, you will be baptised or received into full communion with the Catholic Church. You have reached a turning point in your journey of faith when you are ready to make a solemn commitment to continue on the pathway that has been chosen for you by the Lord himself.

Today the proclamation of the Good News has a special resonance for you as you acknowledge the truth of its meaning for you: The time has come...and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. The Church also recognises this as a moment of solemn decision when she accepts your commitment and chooses you. Like a mother the Church sets her heart on embracing you as her own, claiming you for Christ so that His sacraments may transform your lives for ever.

Even before the formal, sacramental moment when you become members of the Catholic Church your lives have already been touched by the Church's witness and by the example of others who have inspired or encouraged you. Some of them are with you here today, together with your sponsors who will accompany and support you.

You are already united with all of us in a special way as we begin our Lenten pilgrimage, but you can feel strengthened by the knowledge that through our prayers and sustained by our actions the Church elects or chooses you in a way that expresses the choice of Christ himself. That is what lies at the heart of today's Rite of Election.

Being together in the Cathedral offers us a moment to reflect on the gifts we receive as members of the Church. Every Sunday in the Creed we profess our faith in a Church that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These gifts are the essential characteristics of the Church and your lives will be shaped by them increasingly from now onwards.

You are being chosen to be at one with God and at one with your brothers and sisters who are baptised into the Body of Christ. This great gathering is an expression of that oneness as we sense ourselves to be united in heart and mind through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this place we have a foretaste of the communion that will always hold us in unity and in the embrace of Christ's love for us.

The pathway you are walking is one of holiness and it leads towards perfect holiness in the Kingdom of God. That holiness bears fruit in our relationships with others as we bring the gifts of peace, truthfulness, justice and integrity into our daily dealings with one another. Holiness is sustained through the scriptures and the sacraments and we continue to encounter Christ through these precious gifts.

The Catholic Church embraces you today and your lives are to reflect what it means to be catholic. You will be part of a universal family of believers held together by Christ through the faith we proclaim, the sacraments we celebrate and the pastors we follow. Pope Francis is the Church's supreme pastor and we sense our communion with him very powerfully in this celebration.

The commission you are to receive has come to us from the Lord through the Apostles. You are entrusted with an apostolate, to go out and bear witness to your faith in the communities where you live and work, among your families and friends by the example of holy and generous lives.

But the message we preach must also become the message that we ourselves are prepared to embrace. The time has come...the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News. We are at the outset of the season of repentance when we most fervently take these words of Christ to heart and act on them.

The Holy Spirit has made you enthusiastic about your faith and that enthusiasm comes as a precious gift to the Church. The faith of each one of us is strengthened and inspired by your example today and therefore I thank you in the name of the Church. We pray that your enthusiasm may refresh the faith of your brothers and sisters in the Church and that through you new followers of Christ will be drawn towards the Lord by the uplifting example of your lives.

With every Blessing

+Bernard Longley

Archbishop of Birmingham