

Full text of the address given by Archbishop Patrick Kelly at the Reception in Honour of the Presence and Mission of the Church in the Middle East

Venerable English College, Rome

20 October 2008

Your Beatitudes, Your Eminences, Brother Bishops and Priests, Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen.

For 600 years this had been a place of hospitality: a spacious place for guests. Even in such a history, this is a unique gathering and it is unique among all the receptions occurring during this Synod.

But it is true to the Synod on the Word of God: for the Word is a Deed: and the Deed is a Word.. That is why every Christmas, we make our own the words of the first guests of the Lord, when he came among us, as Saint Thomas Aquinas expressed it, to converse with us: "Let us go then unto Bethlehem and see this word that has come to pass." And he closed his conversation with us among us on the night before he died with a wondrous deed. For that night was the night of those Eucharistic words which are surely the words of the Word of God, the deeds of the Deed of God.

So, by the gracious tradition of hospitality of the Rector and Community, of the Venerable English College of Saint Thomas of Canterbury in the City, this evening brings together the lands of the Bible: of the lands of the Medes and the Persians, of Cyrus and Darius, of Ur of the Chaldeans, the Tigris and Euphrates, of the cedars of Lebanon, of Damascus with a street called Straight, of a place across the Jordan, "where John was baptising....because there were many waters there." I've seen them. And one day Jesus would go back across the Jordan to where John used to baptize and many believed in him there: it is not far from Madaba, the home of Archbishop Fouad Twal.

That same Jesus would one day give himself to a man called Saul: a new way of living would spread, in no small measure because of his labours, to a Philippi, a Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, Thessalonica, across Galatia. And the Bible as we know it would end with a letter of comfort to small, poor, frail communities, excluded from the beauty of Temple and the nostalgia of Synagogue, no longer "at ease with the old dispensation with an alien people clutching their gods," as T.S.Eliot would complete his reflection on the coming of the Magi. In particular comfort for Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

But if we would appreciate the imagery of threat and comfort, of power resolved to overwhelm weakness, of beasts ready to devour a new born child, a Lamb, as it were slain, then go to Shiraz in Iran, to Persepolis and see the palace of Darius the Mede, beast, Ram, Bull, Lion, Eagle: but no image of a Lamb. A new sort of Kingdom has been accomplished on a cross as a Mother prayed for him at the hour of his death.

To keep the door open for some of us, for the sake of every disciple, to remain anchored firmly in what God has brought to pass among us in space and time, to the deed, the Word, the fact that allows no middle, but only yes or no: on a hilltop in Jerusalem, not Londinium, on a Friday, not the Sabbath, in the afternoon, not at dawn, God in Christ reconciled the world to himself: to enable us to have access to the hills plains, rivers, trees, animals, languages that keep us true to Incarnation we need our sisters and brothers across the whole Middle East. This evening the rest of us thank God for you, the living stones, we rejoice to know you and promise to accompany you.

Most special of guests in this place that has received tens of thousands of guests, we say in the final words of the Scriptures:

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all."