

**Cardinal's Lecture**  
*26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2009*

***Gaudium et Spes***  
**The Shape of the Church: Past, Present and to Come...**

**Introduction: Weathering an English Spring**

In my idle moments, I often reflect on the lives and times of my nine predecessors as Archbishop of Westminster. It began in 1850 with the restoration of the hierarchy. The first Cardinal, Wiseman, wrote a pastoral letter to the people of England and Wales entitled, 'From out the Flaminian Gate'. In it he said, "Catholic England has been restored to its orbit in the Ecclesiastical firmament from which its light had long vanished and begins anew its course of regularity, around the centre of unity." While rallying the community with a sense of purpose, Wiseman's words also stirred up a hornets' nest. It prompted Queen Victoria to ask, 'Am I the Queen of England or am I not?' To the Prime Minister, John Russell, the act of restoration was the 'aggression of the Pope on Protestantism' Poor Wiseman had to dig himself out of a hole and he replied by issuing another letter entitled, 'An appeal for fair play and reason on the part of the English people.'

This was a more humble letter and spoke of the dire circumstances of so many Catholics. Many were immigrants from Ireland and elsewhere and they lived in appalling poverty. The restoration and building up of the community – spiritually as well as materially – was not easy. But those early years after the restoration of the hierarchy were years of promise. The hopes of that period were perhaps summed up in a most wonderful sermon preached by Newman entitled, 'A Second Spring', which he gave to the assembled bishops and the first provincial synod held at Oscot College. The metaphor of 'spring' was an apt one, but Newman gave it a witty and profound turn. He said, "but still could we be surprised my fathers and my brothers, if the winter even now, should not yet be quite over. Have we any right to take it

strange if in this English land the springtime of the Church should turn out to be an English spring - an uncertain anxious time, of hope and fear, of joy and suffering, of bright promise and budding hopes, yet withal of keen blasts and cold showers and sudden storms.”

The vision and identity of the Catholic community in England and Wales during the 50 years following the restoration of the hierarchy could be summed up in two aims: “Keep the Faith” and “The conversion of England.” The vision of successive bishops here in Westminster and elsewhere in this country was to care for their Catholic people, to ensure that the faith which had been handed down to them by the grace of God was kept and held in an atmosphere and in a culture that was suspicious and antagonistic to the Catholic faith. Without in any way compromising the loyalty of Catholics to the country, there always lingered the hope that one day England would be restored to the ancient Catholic faith. It may have been a dream but it was always there in the prayers and aspirations of the Catholic people, especially those who held the memory of the trials and sufferings of our forebears, of the men and women who had died for their faith in penal times. Running with this was also the desire of an immigrant Catholic community to be recognised as a productive and trusted part of British society. There was, too, the concern of the indigenous recusant tradition not to lose its place in shaping the Church to which it had born heroic witness through the centuries.

These aims were the focus of the Catholic Church for two thirds of the next century. During the period of my predecessors, Cardinal Bourne who reigned from 1903 until 1936, Cardinal Hinsley, Cardinal Griffin and Cardinal Godfrey, the steady consolidation of the Catholic Church took place. It was not without its troubles and difficulties, but in these years the Catholic Church grew. Schools were built to educate the faithful not only in the Faith but so that gradually they could make social

and economic progress. Hospitals, nursing homes and care homes were also built. Many of them not only cared for Catholics, but for others who wanted to benefit from the ethos of these Catholic institutions. For almost 100 years the Church was marked by that rhythm of consolidation and growth. It had a strong sense of its identity and mission coherent with its own history, experience and teaching – ‘Keeping the Faith and the conversion of England.’

And then in 1962 we have Vatican Two. I think it must rank as one of the most significant councils in the life of the Universal Church, and it was to radically alter the identity and vision of the Catholic Church in this country. Cardinal Heenan, a man whom I knew well and greatly admired, had the unenviable task of steering the Church in Westminster and leading the bishops in the turbulent years both during and following the Second Vatican Council.

To the Council itself, Cardinal Heenan’s attitude was rather ambiguous. One historian, Adrian Hastings, recounts that there was a story that two groups of journalists each selected a football team from among the Council Fathers: one to represent the conservatives, the other to represent the progressives. When they compared notes they found that each had selected Heenan to play centre forward!

Cardinal Heenan generally backed reform, but was often undermined by events. The defection of many priests at that time pained him greatly and the reaffirmation of the traditional teaching on contraception in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* caused him much anguish and trouble. The years of his Episcopate and, indeed, the long tenure of his successor Cardinal Basil Hume, found a Catholic Church in a very curious state. It could no longer claim in the old sense that its purpose was the conversion of England because it could not ignore the fact that we were now committed to serious ecumenical dialogue with fellow Christians and, in particular, the Church of England

and the Church in Wales. The recognition of common baptism, Ecumenical sensitivity and an understanding of the fullness of unity which was still to be attained was part of the teaching of the Vatican Council and could not be ignored. Even more so the slogan, 'keep the faith', did not have quite the same ring about it.

Cardinal Hume managed in his own *persona* to suggest that Catholicism was part of English life. He himself became, as it were, almost a part of the Establishment. His period of office for the Catholic Church had been a high profile one in public life, much of it due to his own outstanding witness. Adrian Hastings summed him up by saying, "In retrospect, what matters most about Basil Hume, was not the correctness of every opinion or policy, but his spiritual integrity, recognition of which united Catholics of very differing theological opinions as well as the national community as a whole. He was a sound teacher but a superb witness through the gentle holiness of his behaviour and, as he said himself, "modern man listens more readily to witnesses than to teachers." All of this leaves the Catholic Church of my time and your time still striving clearly to articulate and live out its identity, its vision, its hope.

As I look back I am struck by the continuing prescience of Newman's homily on "the Second Spring." Preached over 150 years ago the Catholic Church in England has lived a very 'English Spring;' Its times of promise and growth but its moments of 'keen blasts and cold shows and sudden storms' as well.

### **The Present Time: *Ad Extra***

I want now to look at some aspects of that springtime landscape today, to reflect with you, first, on some of the challenges posed by our culture and, secondly, to speak about some central aspects of our life as a Church which I believe we are being called to deepen and to cherish. Let's look at some challenges posed by our secular culture.

I have been a priest for over half a century and a bishop for more than 30 years. These have been years of considerable change in the international situation, in our society and also in the Church. Fifty years ago I think most of the values that the Church wanted to uphold were also those that society itself would have agreed with. I am in no doubt that many still recognise and admire the Church's social and charitable work. But for others the Church and indeed Christian life seems to be out of step with 'the spirit of the times.' There has been a subtle but deep change in the way the Catholic Church has been perceived by contemporary culture. It is not that it meets with indifference or even hostility - although that is certainly noticeable - rather it is heard with certain incomprehension. Incomprehension not only makes it difficult for the Church, and indeed, individual Christians, to make their voice heard, it also means that there is the risk of distortion and caricature. Yet I believe the Church has a perspective and a wisdom which our society cannot afford to exclude or silence. The Church's teaching has the whole human good in mind; that is why it is not simply one lobby group among others. Let me give two examples:

### **The Economy**

Faced with the current global and economic crisis, it may seem that the Church's social teaching is the last place to look for ideas. Prayers perhaps, ideas no! I think that would be a mistake. It would take another lecture, I fear, to show why but let me just point in that direction. One of my predecessors, Cardinal Manning, helped shape the beginning of the Church's contemporary social teaching. Manning's writing on the social and economic conditions of the poor, combined with his practical work for them and organised labour contributed to *Rerum Novarum*. He reminded Victorian culture that the worker was not a commodity purely subject to the economic demand or lack of it; the worker was a human being first and should be treated as such. He was clear that the economy must operate within a moral framework and exists to serve

the common good, which is rooted in the good of the human person. If it forgets this, it becomes destructive of the very good it is intended to serve. In other words, money is not an end in itself. His words are very relevant in today's economic climate. The Church does not offer a blueprint for economic policy, but it does argue that if the market is to serve the common good of all then it demands a strong ethical framework and effective regulation. One important test of this is to look at those who benefit. Here the Church has always maintained that the common good cannot be secured if it means the poor just get poorer. The poor must always be given effective preferential consideration. No action, even in critical times, should further disadvantage them or weaken their capacity to participate in the economic system.

### **The Family**

The economic crisis not only places great strains upon our financial institutions and the public purse, it has immediate and long lasting consequences for that most fundamental of all our human and social institutions, the family. We cannot be fulfilled persons without others – we are made for community. That means we must seek to sustain the health of those social institutions which are the foundations of a civilised and humane social sphere. The Church itself is one of these social spheres and that is why she has always recognised the importance of the family. The family is not only the domestic church; it is also the foundation of society. We can see that even in times of political and social collapse, the family has the power to survive and enable others to survive. It is from the family that society can rebuild itself. That is why I believe the Church is so right in continuing to emphasise the fundamental importance of marriage and family life. Socially, our culture has embarked upon experimentation with the meaning and structures of marriage and family. There is a danger that we come to undervalue their importance for human flourishing and for the strength of our cultural and civic life. A failure to appreciate the personal as well as social and economic importance of these two foundational institutions risks a

profound cultural and human impoverishment. There is much manipulation of the concept of marriage today, but it should never blind us to the real value of marriage understood as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman open to the transmission of life ordered to the good of spouses and their children. It seems strange that one should have to preach this in our time, for when asked what is most important to them in survey after survey, people consistently place family at the top of the list; high above health or wealth. We need to secure these goods for the whole of our society and that they should enjoy legal and financial recognition and support.

I hope these two brief examples serve to make the point that the Church is not just another lobby group. It has both balance and insight which can get lost in a caricature or the prejudice that exiles it to a purely private realm of esoteric practice and belief. Taken together, the lack of 'synch', ignorance, and an aggressive secularism which tries to persuade us that every defeat of the Church and restriction of Christian work and influence is a social and personal gain, means that the relationship of the Church to culture is constantly being reshaped. We need, what some have called, a new apologetics of presence.

### **Towards a New Apologetics of Presence**

What might this mean for us? Certainly, we know that there will always be a sense in which Christian life will always swim against the stream. Indeed it is that different way of seeing, that different way of being, that is the gift of faith to every culture. I think, though, that this difference is a genuinely creative encounter with culture; it is not an unfortunate by-product of being out of sympathy with contemporary trends. The distinctive way of being Christian is surely grounded in the way in which the Church understands the dignity and destiny of every person before God and their infinite value in His eyes. And it is this very depth of understanding – we might call it loving – that also gives an attunement to the longing and desire for what is genuinely good

and life-giving that every person has, whether they share our faith or not, whether they can articulate it or not.

This is why the Church's first word should never be "No". It is always a "Yes" to the fundamental calling and dignity of life, through which we come to see more clearly the necessary "No's" that must also be uttered if the truth is to be spoken. To be sure there is much that is deeply troubling about our culture and its values. And in fact it is tempting - and certainly headline making - to simply to list what is wrong. One could say, for instance, that we now live not in a liberal but a libertine society in which all moral and ethical boundaries seem to have gone out the window. But that is too quick, and it ignores the fact that there are very many people trying their best, deeply concerned about the future, and alive to the humanly destructive power of so many forces at large. The truth is that to be human is to be deeply tempted to be good. And what is needed is a renewed sensitivity to the moral and ethical dimensions of living which very many want to see more firmly embraced and spoken of, and in particular the importance of individual personal responsibility, which is also part of mature freedom. We need to encourage and affirm the good in each person, rather than simply naming the bad. It is only if the joys and hopes of humanity are shared first that true and lasting change is possible.

Two weeks ago I gave an interview to The Times. The two women journalists who interviewed me, not necessarily Christian, seemed remarkably attuned to the values that the Church speaks about. They were mothers, and deeply concerned about the values that they wanted to give their children - those simple basic lights we need to guide us through the complexities and changes of our lives. They wanted to give their children values that would last, that one could live by and build a life on. Those women were good parents and I believe they expressed a heart-felt concern which the majority of parents share about the emptiness and transience of so much that



passes for standards and values in our society. They were searching and they need support to have confidence that their intuition was a good one. How interesting then in a survey reported this week on the BBC almost two-thirds of those questioned said the law "should respect and be influenced by UK religious values", and a similar proportion agreed that "religion has an important role to play in public life".

Many of the arguments of secularism seek to offer a new and liberated self-sufficient humanism. Yet, I think, they can only end in the death of the human spirit because they are fundamentally reductionist. They have an impoverished understanding of what it is to be human which means that in the end they have no satisfactory defence against the instrumentalisation of the person. Pope Benedict expresses this when he says, "People today need to be reminded of the ultimate purpose of their lives. They need to recognise that implanted within them is a deep thirst for God. They need to be given opportunity to drink from the wells of his infinite love. It is easy to be entranced by the almost unlimited possibilities that science and technology place before us; it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that we can obtain by our own efforts fulfilment of our deepest needs. This is an illusion. Without God who alone bestows upon us what we by ourselves cannot attain, our lives are ultimately empty."

What marks the Church of Wiseman, Manning, Hinsley, Heenan and Hume is its response to the challenges that faced it. In many ways it was a poor and under-resourced Church, but what it may have lacked in material things it made up for in energy and confidence. This does not come from any recognition of the Church as an institution. One day the Church may be in favour with the secular powers, another it may be pilloried. We do not seek respectability, we seek faithfulness - faithfulness to the reality of Christ who is the Light of this age and every age and to the Church which receives its truth from Him and the gift of his Spirit. And with that faithfulness to Christ and his Church comes faithfulness to what it is to be human and building of

a society in which everyone has the capacity to flourish whatever their race, creed, age, status and ability. The lamentation for a past time, some glorious golden age, is not a Christian song. It is not the song of faith but of despair, for our faith gives us a vision not of what has been but of what will be – whatever the difficulties or sufferings we have to endure – we cannot surrender or lose confidence in the future which God has secured for us. This is why the Church must always be an active agent in the creation and building up of a genuinely humane culture.

Let me make some simple practical suggestions which might help our secular society understand the Church and come to see it as a partner in the common good, not an adversary.

First, there is a need for the State to acquire a better understanding of the contribution and place of faith in British society. Legislation on discrimination, much of it good in itself, is now being used to limit freedom of religion in unacceptable ways. The sad and totally needless conflict over the Catholic adoption agencies is one example. But that is a symptom of a wider prejudice that sees religious faith as a problem to be contained rather than a social good to be cherished and respected, and which properly and necessarily has a public as well as a private dimension.

Second, extensive contributions made by Christian charities in the UK have been largely underestimated by the authorities. Governments would be wise to provide a greater and more autonomous role for the voluntary sector in delivering key public services. Many of these charities not only serve their own religious communities but the whole community irrespective of religious affiliation or none. I am thinking also of the excellent voluntary social work done in all the parishes of our country and without recompense but contributing in a wonderful way to the common good and social cohesion.

These are two small practical aspects of what I am calling a new apologetics of presence. It is a way of keeping open a space for what is good and truly human, for the Christian life when it is lived in its beauty, generosity and depth, is a life that is good; it is a life which is fully human.

### **Towards the Future: The Life of the Church *Ad intra***

So now let us turn to the life of the Church with the gifts that it has to face the future with confidence and with hope. I am, like Pope John XXIII, not a prophet of gloom. As one writer has put it, “We should remember that there are rhythms of faith and history. The life of the Spirit grows often in hidden ways when all the signs are contrary. In these times we are not dying or declining, we are being made ready and learning anew who we are and what we are called to do. The world may try to describe us, but it cannot judge the life of the Spirit or the work that God is doing in his people.”

I say this because I think the greatest danger for us at the moment is to let ourselves believe what secular culture wants us to believe about ourselves, namely, that we are becoming less and less influential and are in decline. There are certainly challenges and there is much work for us to do. But on the contrary I believe that the Church has a vigorous life, and a crucial role to play in our society - more important than at any other time in our recent history.

There are many different voices within the Church at the moment seeking to explain our problems and what we need to do to put them right. We must be attentive and discriminating but we must not allow our energies to get drawn into a Corinthian brawl, “I belong to Paul - I belong to Apollos” (I. Cor. 1.12). We belong to Christ and we are bound in unity by the ministry of Peter and the Apostolic College.

Every Bishop and every Bishops' Conference has the responsibility of discerning what is the best way for the local Church to live in and respond to the situation in which it finds itself. They have a duty to be faithful to the truth of faith and the Magisterium of the Church and this is not a burden but a source of life. Even so, each local church will bring its experience and needs to that task. It will also judge the best way of accomplishing its mission to make the life of the Gospel real in its own culture. That means there will be legitimate differences of style, of emphasis and approach. This is not a problem or a threat or a sign of disintegration or assimilation, rather it is a sign of vitality. Unity is not uniformity. It is also a sign of confidence and above all it is a sign that the Church is not afraid to go out and meet the culture and to order its life to the service of the Gospel. If, like me, you have had the experience of visiting the Church in many different parts of the world, you cannot help but see this and rejoice in the life of the Spirit it manifests. But by the same token you will also know you are in the Catholic Church. The genius of Catholicism is that it is genuinely universal and responds to every culture without ceasing to be itself.

So this, it seems to me, is a time of preparation rather than diminishment. I have spoken of the creativeness of the Christian difference. The Spirit is preparing us to bring something 'other', something 'different' to our culture, something which our culture cannot bring for itself. This 'other' is nothing else but the truth and life-giving presence of God.

At the beginning of this lecture I summarised the way in which the catholic community thought of its mission since the restoration of the Hierarchy as 'keep the faith and the conversion of England'. Has it really changed that much? The work since Vatican Two has been deepening our faith and coming to appreciate its dynamism, especially in the renewed theology of the laity and the universal call to holiness. Perhaps now more than ever we can see what "the conversion of England"

means is reaching out to a culture which is deeply secularised and yet longs to hear a voice of meaning and hope.

So where to begin? I want to single out three aspects of the life of the Church today that seem to me to be crucial: formation, parish renewal, and prayer.

### **Formation**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Church in England and Wales made a courageous decision. It would devote its energies and resources to educating its people. It well understood that an education was critical, not only to the life of the Church itself, but also to the capacity of the Catholic community to play a significant and productive part in the life of the nation. We have seen the wisdom of that policy and the benefits that it has brought to many generations of Catholics and their families. We now have a vibrant, professional and committed educational system throughout England and Wales. I think our schools have publically demonstrated their value. They have shown that so called 'faith schools' do not breed prejudice or division; indeed they are often the most creative and innovative in dealing with such problems. But we now need to give special attention and care in all our programmes to formation in the life of faith. The Church badly needs confident, theologically and spiritually well formed lay as well as clerical members if it is to respond to the challenges of a secular world. Our people need to know the tradition in which they stand; they have a baptismal right to be nourished by its wisdom and its beauty. Above all, as the recent Synod on The Word of God brought out, we need to nourish ourselves and our faith with the Gospels. It is there that we come to know Christ, to hear his word, and enter into the gift and mystery of the kingdom.

It is now 40 years since the end of the Vatican II and we are still in the process of appropriating its profound insights. We need to return to the Council, reading it in the

light of our experiences as Church and the new situation of our world. We should try to attend especially to the social teaching of the Church because it has a richness, wisdom and humanity.

### **Renewal of the Parish Community**

But for most Catholics their life, both social and spiritual, happens in their parishes. Again and again, one must strive to create from our parishes, not a geographical area or a canonical entity, but a living community. The parish is the first point of contact when people move in to a new area of life. Not only is it a place where people gather on a Sunday, it is the space in which lives and histories are held.

In the rhythms of the liturgical year our stories are told, our weariness held and carried, our pain touched and our brokenness mended. In that meeting with others of faith are the familiar word of the Mass, the candles, the prayers, the hymns, the familiar personalities of the saints and martyrs, our worries and concerns, our failures and successes; all brought into the movement of God's triune life. Almost imperceptibly we are touched by the grace of a timeless love that meets us in our time. Hear, too, mingling with our lives are the lives of all who have come here and all who will come here. We know we are not perfect and we know that our parishes are not perfect, but sometimes we catch a sense of all those generations of faith who have lived lives like our own and so we settle into a faith well lived. Our lives are touched with a Presence that waits on us.

So, I do not believe our parishes are dead or dying. Even though we may have to reduce their number we must give priority to rediscovering how vital the parish is to nourish our faith in so many different ways. The Eucharist is, of course, 'the source and summit' of the Church's life. As well as being reverently and prayerfully celebrated it needs to be informed by the celebration the Word. Scripture must be

opened up to people, so that they in their turn can read it and meditate upon it, letting it feed and shape lives. The homily is a privileged moment of spiritual leadership which needs prayer and reflection as well as study. But above all, people need to see how their priest lives the gospel which he is charged with preaching and how it illuminates and guides his life. If the Word is not alive in us, how can we give life to others?

If our parishes are places where we are known and welcomed, especially if we are new or visiting, then I think everyone benefits. It is a way of building up the body of Christ and demonstrating that our believing means belonging.

### **Prayer**

At the heart of all our words and actions is the gift of prayer. I have been speaking about the secular challenges of this world, but everywhere I see a hunger for spirituality, a desire for something that can give meaning, hope and peace. And if anything is our strength it is our prayer. It is out of this that we live; without it our words would be empty and our actions powerless.

Prayer is not complicated, it does not need books or courses or professors. All we need is our faith, our desire and our need. With these we are drawn each day to the One who is our life, our joy and our hope. Our need, our desire to pray may take us to church, a holy place or a shrine, but the fact is that we can pray wherever we find ourselves, whatever our state. The secret of prayer is that it takes two - myself and God. Once we realise this prayer becomes simple and straightforward because we know that God has given Himself so completely and totally to us, that we know he is always there for us. God does not need to find us, he has never left us. But sometimes we can leave Him. Yet no matter how long we have been away or how deep our silence has been, he has never left us. On every road, down every path, in

every situation he has been there waiting for us to speak, to call out His name, to come home.

Often God has to purify our faith and our trust. At times we reach out to Him and we can feel only an absence; the silence can be frightening and we can feel abandoned. These moments are not easy. But God does not play games with us. Even in these dry and painful moments, like the Israelites in the desert or Christ in his temptations, we are being prepared to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ and share in his mission. Often in these times, too, we discover the beauty of the Church and our need of it. In the daily round of its prayer and sacrament, in the unseen lives of its faithful, we are carried and our faith, no matter how weak or weary, bruised or strained is taken up and made complete. In the simple but profound words of the Mass, 'look not upon our sins but upon the faith of your Church.'

When a person prays, even a little, two things begin to happen. First, we begin to know our poverty. As St Augustine says, "When we pray we are all God's beggars." Second, we begin to love, maybe for the first time, in a different way. If God invites us into His life, how can we not know how poor we are? But this poverty is not a lack rather it is a sense of how much we have received. From it grows a new way of loving. This love fills our hearts; it is a gift from the Spirit who teaches us and opens our eyes and our hearts to the way God loves. One of the gifts that I have been given in my comparatively long life is to meet and experience the lives of so many saintly and holy people filled with the love of God and giving their lives to others in a way that manifests that goodness of God in a way that is also quite extraordinary. This is the key to evangelisation – to live our lives so that we may elicit faith in others.

All our prayer flows from and returns to the great prayer of the Holy Eucharist in which Christ shows us that the heart of prayer is His action. And so our hearts are



lifted up, not by our own effort, but by Him and we discover that even in sacrifice there is glory and joy. If each day our lives are renewed in this prayer, we need not worry about the future and what it may bring. This is why I think Wiseman's letter from the Flaminian Gate, and Newman's sermon on the Second Spring should not be read as exercises in restorationist triumphalism. Each in its own way is effectively framing the community's 'Magnificat'.

## **Conclusion**

In this lecture I have looked back at the past 160 years and seen the challenges that the Church faced in the Episcopal light of my predecessors as Archbishop of Westminster. We have seen how the Catholic Church in these times has grown and developed, but also changed in its attitude and approach because the culture of our country has changed and the Catholic community itself has changed. We are beginning to understand our identity and vision in a new way in this our secular, multi-cultured society. It is a vision that doesn't take us out of this world, but prompts us to be ourselves in it, finding new ways to seek a place in the Areopagus of our nation and to find, in collaboration with others, the right not just to exist, but to express what we deeply believe is important for the common good. At the heart of this is the search for God which is at the heart of every human person. We do not seek to impose our views on others but to offer them as a way - that we believe is *the* way - for life to flourish.

In a sense I have been speaking about the three great theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love that mark our Christian life. But there are also the 'Cardinal' virtues – if you see what I mean. They are the virtues which have indeed marked my predecessors and the community of faith which they led. Of those virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, I think it is the gift of Fortitude that has been most immediately evident of the Catholic Church in England & Wales over the

past 150 years. I pray that it is also the virtue that distinguishes us most too in this time. Fortitude it is not a grim or sullen virtue. It has an understated but joyful strength; there's a serenity in it for the faithful and enduring strength that it brings rests on the knowledge that Christ is Lord of every age and all time. It is Fortitude that makes us trustworthy witnesses, faithful to the precious gift of salvation that we have received for all humanity. In the words of I Peter it is a readiness, whatever the season, 'to give an answer to everyone who asks the reason for the hope that we have.' (I Peter. 3.15)

The time of Lent is a time when we can reflect on these things, with renewed hope and life. In the Preface we say today, "Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the Paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. You give us a spirit of loving reverence for you our Father and of willing service to our neighbour. As we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ, you bring the image of your Son to perfection in us.' The prayer today also expresses it all: "Lord, may everything we do begin with Your inspiration, continue with Your help and reach perfection under Your guidance. Amen"