



FLAME YOUTH CONGRESS

Archbishop Vincent Nichols' Address

WEMBLEY ARENA, 24 MARCH 2012

There's a famous painting called 'The Light of the World'. It shows Jesus holding a burning lamp, knocking on a closed door. At the first showing of the painting, the artist, Holman Hunt, when asked why the door had no handle, replied it was because the door on which Jesus knocks can be opened only from the inside.

That door is the door of our hearts. The Lord's knocking upon our hearts isn't the noise of one demanding entry, rather the enquiring knock of one seeking us out in gentleness and love. I hope that during this day each of you has both heard the Lord knocking on that door and opened it to him. This is a crucial experience which shapes our entire lives, our understanding of who we are and who we're called to be.

The one who knocks is the light of the world, by which we see things as they truly are: ourselves, our actions, our neighbours, our family, our society, and our pathway ahead. Others try to cast a different light on all these things. There are some very bright lights around: blinding lights whose brightness stuns us, causing us to lose our sense of balance; strobe lights beguiling and seducing us with their rhythm and effects so that we lose our inner self and become simply part of a mass movement; customer-designed lights, leading us to think we can each provide our own light, our own values, our own individual pathway through life.

The light of Christ is none of these: it's steady, warm, inviting. It's a revelation, not a personal invention. It's a gift offered from outside of us, yet longing to find a home within us, to penetrate the darkness we so easily sense within ourselves.

Listen again to the words of Pope Benedict speaking to you, on the Piazza of Westminster Cathedral in September of 2010:

'I ask each of you first and foremost to look into your heart, think of all the love that your heart was made to receive, and also the love it is meant to give, after all we were made for love. This is what the Bible means when it says that we are made in the image and likeness of God.'

The Holy Father then went on to speak of the love we receive – from family and friends and all who help us; and of the love we give, in enthusiasm, in generosity and idealism. He then said this:

'I ask you to look into your hearts each day to find the source of all true love: Jesus. He is always there, quietly waiting for us to be still with him and to hear his voice. Deep within your heart he is calling you to spend time with him in prayer, and this kind of prayer, real prayer, requires discipline. It requires time for moments of silence every day. Often it means waiting for the Lord to speak. We need to make time and -space for silence...because it is in silence that we find God and in silence we discover our true self.'

These powerful words lead us now into the silence of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. This has been a wonderful gathering. I'm so grateful to everyone who's worked immensely hard to ensure that there's been so much to inspire you. But the best moments are still ahead of us. Here, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, everything comes together.

Here is the Lord. He wants to be present with us in this great gift of the Blessed Sacrament. He makes his love for us vividly clear. He's present in the moment of his total self-giving, as on the Cross, a body broken for us, blood poured out for us. This is the sacrament of his Sacrifice, of his Love, made present in every time and place so that no woman or man, no girl or boy may ever doubt their own true worth. In this Sacrament, Jesus says to each of us: I love you. I give myself for you. You are my work of art. For your forgiveness, for your freedom, for your life I gave mine.

People often say that true love accepts me as I am. That's correct, but not the whole truth. True love wants only what's best for the beloved. True love wants us to grow, not to stay as we are. True love has high hopes for the beloved and isn't satisfied with 'things just as they are'. True love, the love that Jesus has for each of us, calls us to be more, to strive for goodness, even for perfection.

This is what the Holy Father means when he says that in prayer with the Lord we discover our true self. He explained that here we discover the particular vocation God has for each one of us, 'for the building up of his Church and for the redemption of the world.' There are many ways in which this can be done. But in that invitation to work for the building up of the Church and for the redemption of the world is the secret of a happy life: to serve the Lord with all our hearts and never lose trust in him.

That's the key witness we can give today: to embody the joy and happiness which comes with loving generously. This is the light we want to shine in the sight of everyone, so that they may give the praise to our Father in heaven.

Now is the time for prayer, precious moments when heart speaks unto heart. My prayer is with yours, yours with mine, that we may serve the Lord with gladness all our days. Amen

+ Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster