

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNION OF CATHOLIC MOTHERS, GLASGOW

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

MONDAY 19TH NOVEMBER 2007

CHURCH OF CHRIST THE KING, KING'S PARK, GLASGOW

INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a privilege for me being here with you this evening – as principal celebrant and as preacher.

First of all I wish to convey the apologies of your own Archbishop for his inability to be here this evening. Your Archbishop is at this present time in London representing our Church at the diamond jubilee celebrations of the marriage of Her Majesty the Queen to the Duke of Edinburgh.

I will refer to that event later in my words but simply initially thank you all for gathering here this evening for this celebration.

MEMORIES OF 1947:

I ask you – or those of you who are of my age and above to think back 60 years ago to 1947, when the Queen and the Duke were married. I think I am in correct in believing that a reasonable number of you are able to do that.

I have no hesitation in indicating that I myself am approaching 70 years of age and was born in 1938. Consequently in 1947 I was just nine years of age and my abiding memories of that time was the reuniting of our family following on my father having been 22 years in the Royal Navy including of course six years of service during the Second World War when he was frequently away from home. Our little family was united with my grandmother and my mother's brother and his family in one house when after the War my father was looking for work.

At that time work was not easy to find anywhere and he was encouraged to move to Glasgow to undertake responsibility with the Civil Service then based in Clyde Street. Consequently just 2 years after 1947, in 1949, our family moved to Glasgow – or rather to the outskirts of Glasgow to St Stephen's Parish in Dalmuir – basically in Clydebank.

You can imagine the shock which we had when we moved to a Clydebank devastated by the Second World War; when we made our home in the ground floor of a tenement standing almost in isolation in Radnor Street on the top of Kilbowie Road with the ruins of other houses lying around us. It was then that the reality of the War which was known to my father during his service years in the Royal Navy came home to us all.

It was at such a time in such conditions that the Union of Catholic Mothers was founded.

REASONS FOR FOUNDATION OF UNION OF CATHOLIC MOTHERS:

I think the reasons for the Foundation of the Union of Catholic Mothers at that time were easy to see.

Many families had been broken up during the Second World War – one might say perhaps through the death of a husband or a father, perhaps through the desolation experienced by all families at that time, perhaps by the sadness of trying to cope and rebuild lives again with homes having been destroyed.

In the Clydebank of that time our parish and parish church was the centre of our lives – and for that I will always thank St Stephen's parish and church in Dalmuir. Similarly with other parishes and communities throughout Scotland, particularly those with the strength of faith lived by the Catholic community.

Yes we had a centre for our worship and a centre for our faith in our parish and in those days' people of similar ages and backgrounds stuck together and grew together ever more closely. It was always natural for groups of young people to unite in the church youth clubs, there were the women's guilds and the men's guilds and then there was that spiritual organisation called the Union of Catholic Mothers which brought Catholic Mothers together to give one another mutual support and to unite them in prayer for their families and friends and especially to pray for vocations to the Priesthood and the religious life.

GROWTH THEN DECLINE OF THE UCM:

For many years the Union of Catholic Mothers continued to grow in Glasgow and in the other dioceses of Scotland.

I myself witnessed the practical value of the UCM when after five years in Glasgow my family moved through to Edinburgh in 1954. I was then in my fifth year at secondary school when my mother was suddenly struck down by an unknown brain virus. Obviously boys were not told much about their mother's ill health in those days – but I realised that something was most seriously wrong when on sitting my Highers my mother was not well enough to ask me even how I had got on! She died a very sudden and tragic death after a short illness within the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

You can imagine the desolation experienced by my father, by my young brother and myself just one year in a new city in a new parish and not really knowing where to turn with no family and friends nearby.

It was then that the Union of Catholic Mothers in our parish in Edinburgh, St Columba's in Upper Gray Street, came to the rescue in a very practical way. Little did we know where all the homemade baking and cooking came from, little did we know how carefully we were watched by the members of the UCM – but great practical charity was accomplished by the Union of Catholic Mothers of which my mother had become a member shortly after our move to Edinburgh.

One might ask why the decline over the years. I simply would presume to say that it is because of the decline in so many other ways in organisations whether for men or women whether attached to the Church or in secular society.

People seem to be so “busy” nowadays that they do not give themselves the same time to meet together, to talk to one another, to share something of their faith and to share their prayer. And, of course, many are otherwise fruitfully involved in other and new practical ways in parish life – being involved in the ministries of reading or of the Eucharist, and co-operating in various ways in parish and Deanery Pastoral Councils.

THE YEARS WHICH LIE AHEAD:

One must ask just what lies ahead having celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Union of Catholic Mothers here in Glasgow as perhaps you now look forward to the centenary!

If the Church and society has changed rapidly and almost beyond recognition in the past sixty years we must expect something of the same in the next forty years. As we cannot imagine the changes which we have experienced within our own lifetimes we must question what will the world be like for our children and our children’s people as they grow up in the Church and in the world of today!

We read of things, we see things portrayed on television, we know of Acts passed by our Parliaments at Holyrood and Westminster which we would never have believed possible. What does the future hold?

Whatever the future holds we must ensure that not only our own faith is strong but also that faith of our young people who will be the parents and grandparents of tomorrow, we must ensure that our children are brought up in that cradle of the faith which is a Catholic home, strengthened and nourished by our Catholic primary and secondary schools.

CONCLUSION:

Pope Benedict recently spoke of the witness of the Christian of the world of today and said: “We have to witness to God in a world that has problems finding him and to make God visible in the human face of Christ, to offer people access to the source without which our morale becomes sterile and loses its reference point, to give joy as well because we are not alone in this world!”

I see that as one of the roles of the Union of Catholic Mothers whether small in number or trying to increase recruits to the UCM at this present time.

The members of the Union of Catholic Mothers have to witness to God in this world which has problems finding him. It is our responsibility to make God visible in the human face of Christ and to offer people access to that source of all life and all love Jesus Christ himself.

May this organisation continue to thank God on the occasion of this anniversary; may it continue to grow and offer help wherever there is need; and may those standards which inspired the Mothers of Scotland and of Glasgow sixty years ago, may those same standards continue to inspire each one of us as we continue to live out Catholic Christian lives at this present time and hand on something of our life and of our love to others.

