

ANNUAL MARGARET SINCLAIR DAY

MASS IN ST PATRICK'S, EDINBURGH

HOMILY PREACHED BY BISHOP JOHN MONE

SUNDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2007

I feel it is a privilege to have been invited to give this homily at the National Pilgrimage Day in honour of the Venerable Margaret Sinclair.

On several occasions in the past I have attended the services in Mount Vernon Cemetery in the days of Fr Denis O'Connell. So now I am thrilled to be here in St Patrick's, her parish and centre of her sacramental faith.

Whenever I read about Margaret Sinclair I am inspired by her burning desire to care for others and serve them in any way she could. I'm sure she was inspired by Christ's words, "I have come, not to be served but to serve." I am always touched by how much the poor share (SOMALIA). I'm reminded of a visit I made to Somalia some years ago. The poverty I encountered there was extreme — literally, the people had nothing. I was out one day and met a small boy. I imagine he had no idea who I was, just a white stranger in his land. I searched my pockets for something to give him, and all I could find was a biscuit I'd been given the day before. I handed it to him, and he was clearly delighted. He looked over towards a group of children some distance away, and I thought he was hoping no-one had seen him receive the biscuit — a precious gift for someone so hungry. But I was wrong. He walked over to the other children and shared the biscuit with them. He had so little, but he gave so much.

When I was a young boy, my party piece was a song called "I want to be happy but I can't be happy till I make you happy too." It really is the secret of true happiness. It is not what the media advertising offers us as everyone seeks happiness. It is within ourselves and is an unselfish love.

St Paul says "the Lord loves a cheerful giver." That was Margaret Sinclair. She was poor, born poor, died poor but gave so much of herself that she enriched others from her poverty.

I remember being in North Kenya in a very remote area among the poorest of the poor. The whole village came out to greet my arrival with the words "You are the first bishop since the beginning of creation to visit us." I offered Mass for them and was told there were about five thousand people in the congregation. The Mass lasted several hours. The offertory procession took about one hour as each one brought me a banana, an orange, an onion, a potato, a cabbage, a rabbit etc. — even a goat! This too was poor enriching the well-off from their poverty.

Margaret's caring expressed itself in the fact she was always smiling. She believed she could brighten up people's lives with a smile and even give them the courage to go on. I am reminded of the poem "Smile" (which I will quote)

Margaret said she imagined Our Lady smiling on Mother Abbess as she renewed her vows. Can you think when Our Lady smiled? In the hymn “As I kneel before you”, we sing “as I see your smiling face.” We know Our Lady smiled at Lourdes, Bernadette was ordered to throw holy water at the Apparition in case it was the devil in disguise. Bernadette said Our Lady just smiled with the most beautiful smile she had ever seen. Given Margaret’s sense of humour and fun, she must have enjoyed that story when she came across it.

She was a lovely mixture of piety and gaiety, showing everyone that you can be holy and happy at the same time. Some saints can appear so remote with severe penances and constant ecstatic prayers that I can’t identify with them. Far removed from us poor mortals. But Margaret is inspirational and I believe would make a great saint. From earliest days, she chose God as her first love. Her choice to join the Poor Clares in 1923 was a choice of PRAYER and PENANCE. Margaret’s whole desire was to follow the Divine Will. I wonder if she ever read in Dante’s “Paradise” what is considered to be among the most beautiful words penned “In his will, is our peace.”

We should remember that two Popes have acknowledged her goodness. Pope Paul VI in declaring her Venerable, said she was a miraculous example of evangelical perfection and outstanding Virtue.

Pope John Paul II whose visit to Scotland twenty five years ago, we have just commemorated as “Church” at Carfin last Sunday, visited Rosewell. He knew it was associated with Margaret and on that occasion, likened her holy life and final suffering to the Gospel text “Come to me all you who are burdened and I will give you rest.”

The Pope spoke of her simplicity, touched by God with true holiness all her life, as a child, as a young woman, as a factory worker and as a religious sister.

A good many years ago the Bishops of Scotland were making their 5 year “Ad limina” visit to Rome. We all sat down one day to lunch with John Paul II. Cardinal O’Brien brought up the subject of Margaret Sinclair. When it was said that she was a French Polisher, the Pope mistakenly thought she was of French/Polish extraction. Being Polish himself he said to Cardinal O’Brien, “Pray for a miracle and I will be happy to beatify her.” He had also spoken about her beatification when in Scotland on that visit in 1982.

Let’s take up that challenge anew and pray earnestly that God will open the door through which Margaret Sinclair will be named as one of the Blessed in Heaven.

SMILE

Smiling is infectious, you catch it like the flu,
When someone smiled at me today, I started smiling too
I passed around the corner and someone saw my grin
And when he smiled, I realised I’d passed it on to him
I thought about that smile then I realised its worth
A single smile, just like mine could travel round the earth
So if you feel a smile begin, don’t leave it undetected
Let’s start an epidemic quick and get the world infected.

