

CHRISM MASS

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL, EDINBURGH

TUESDAY 18TH MARCH 2008

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

INTRODUCTION:

At this evening's Mass as you know I bless and consecrate the oils to be used throughout our Archdiocese this coming year.

We think of the **oil of the sick**. Perhaps a special focus of our thoughts at this time should be the tremendous healing which has continued at Lourdes year by year for the past 150 years since the apparitions of Our Blessed Lady to St Bernadette. Over those 150 years, and indeed since the Sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ right up to the present time, countless thousands of people have been healed spiritually through the Sacrament of Penance and others healed physically and spiritually through the Sacrament of the Sick with the intercession of Almighty God.

We think of the **oil of catechumens**. So many are preparing each year for their initiation into life as a Christian or reception into full communion with the Church. Those Sacraments of Initiation are the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist – preparing and helping us as we lead our Christian lives.

We think of the **consecration of the oil of chrism**. We are reminded of the Sacrament of Holy Orders with its three 'degrees': diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy. We remember our need of this Sacrament of Holy Orders, remembering that if there is no priesthood, then we have no Mass and no Eucharist. We pray for all our priests and for me as your Archbishop as this evening we renew our commitment to priestly service.

Of course never far from our thoughts is that **marriage covenant** by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love which has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator – with Christ himself raising marriage between the baptised to the dignity of a sacrament.

I do not intend to give a deep theological teaching this evening on each of the sacraments. Rather I would like to tell you a true story of how I learned of the sacraments in action in our Archdiocese shortly after the Mass of the Chrism last year.

THE SACRAMENTS IN ACTION:

My involvement in this story began on Easter Sunday one year ago when I met a couple leaving the Cathedral, Michael and Nuri Tweed, a young American couple with Nuri in a wheelchair and being pushed by Michael.

I will let Nuri and Michael speak for themselves in a letter which they sent to me dated 7th January 2008. I find it a very beautiful letter and I will read it exactly as it was sent to me including the names of all those involved in the journey of Nuri and Michael.

“I hope this letter finds you in good health and full of the graces of God. I would like to take a moment of your time to express my sincere gratitude to you and to your clergy for the warmth and sympathy we were provided while in Edinburgh. Between September of 2006 and June of 2007 my wife and I were temporary residents of the Western General Hospital and Astley Ainslie while my wife convalesced after suffering a brain haemorrhage. We were scheduled to be married at St Mary’s Church in Kelso, but unfortunately my wife suffered an aneurysm three days before our wedding was to take place. We met you in the Cathedral after Mass on Easter Sunday. My wife was in a wheelchair and you gave her a special blessing that day. She also had the pleasure of a hospital visit from you while she was a patient at Astley Ainslie. We were so impressed and touched that someone with such a demanding schedule and so much responsibility was able to visit parishioners in the hospital. We wanted to thank you for taking care of us during our time of need and for your stewardship over the priests in Edinburgh. We were so very impressed with all the priests we encountered during our ten month stay in Edinburgh. The Catholics of Edinburgh are truly blessed to have such warm and caring clergymen and a great yet humble Archbishop. It is easy to see how your leadership has positively affected the priests and deacons you guide. Throughout our stay in Edinburgh, we heard nothing but praise and admiration for you and the Catholic Clergy in your Diocese.

We especially wanted to note the works of Father Tom Molloy. He guided us through very difficult times and was our rock when all seemed to drop out from beneath us. We also wanted to mention Father David Gemmell and Father Hugh Purcell from St Mary’s and Father Anthony Clancy from Leith. They all were very responsive to our needs and were always willing to provide us with the guidance and reassurance we needed. We would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Father Jeremy Bath, Deacon Duncan and Margaret McMenomy of St Mary’s in Kelso. They not only opened the doors to their church for our wedding, but they opened their hearts to us and blessed us with their warmth and kindness. Although our stay in Scotland was the result of a horrible incident, the love and compassion we received quickly overcame our despair and left an indelible mark in our hearts that will forever make the people of Scotland sacred to us both. We both pray that one day we will be able to return to Scotland to share, once again, the blessings that God has bestowed upon us all in that special place.

I am also pleased to inform you that Nuri and I were happily married at St John’s Church in Burlington, Iowa on 17th August 2007. The ceremony was quite simple, but it was such a blessing to finally enjoy the sacrament of matrimony after such a long and a difficult delay. We hope and pray that Nuri’s condition will improve one day so that she can walk down the aisle in her beautiful dress and enjoy all the trappings of a fully fledged wedding.

Nuri continues to improve ever so slightly each day. She still struggles with paralysis in three of her four limbs, but seems to grow faintly stronger each day. In contrast to all the doctors’ predictions, she continues to defy the odds by edging ever closer to recovery”

Michael then gives details of some future medical procedures and continues his letter:

“Nuri continues to make much improvement with her verbal and cognitive skills and is talking more and more. Each day it seems she is able to comprehend a wee bit more than the day before. She even tries to sing the hymns at Mass every now and again. We have both been so blessed!

Thank you again for all you and your clergy did for us and continue to do for us to this day. I hope and pray that we will be able to return some day to show you how God has blessed us both with Nuri’s full recovery!

May God continue to shower you and all the people of Scotland with his blessings.

Michael and Nuri Tweed”

CONCLUSION:

There is little more for me to add at this present time to that particular story of Michael and Nuri Tweed’s involvement in the sacramental life of our Church. It is an account of how people in our Archdiocese have used the gifts of the sacrament they have received.

Obviously, I have replied personally to Nuri and Michael, thanking them for their letter and expressing my joy with them on the improvement of Nuri’s health, so that they were able to get married last 17 August. I added:

“It was very humbling for me reading what you wrote about my own ministry – and also that of the priests of the Diocese including, of course, one of our permanent deacons and the lay person in the Borders. I assure you that we would all say it was simply part of our shared priestly ministry and that we were only too happy to have had the opportunity of helping two such wonderful people as yourselves. I am dictating this letter following on my return from Cambodia. It is indeed in serving some of the poorest of the poor that each priest really finds himself in his ministry, whether within the confines of our own Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh or indeed in various parts of the world, as I am now privileged to do. I would hope to let my priests know of your own kindness and example to us on some future occasion. You mention that you do hope that Nuri’s condition will so improve that one day ‘she can walk down the aisle in her beautiful dress and enjoy all the trappings of a full fledged wedding’. If that indeed does happen and you are able to let me know in good time, I will ensure that our Archdiocese is represented at what will be a wonderful occasion in your lives”.

Perhaps I should apologise to those concerned for using their names without asking permission. However I thought it was important that all of you realise that Nuri and Michael Tweed were referring to real people. Further I am sure that I could have included in various other accounts the names of most of the priests of our Archdiocese, of our permanent deacons, lay assistants or the lay faithful in general in our Archdiocese instead of the ones used in this particular letter from Nuri and Michael.

The gifts which Christ has left us in the Sacraments are immense. Our use of the Sacraments leads us to the building up of the Church; as the Church is built up, so Christ is seen as ever more effective in our Archdiocese. Let us all continue to use those Sacraments as best we can realising the wonder of our own vocation. At this Chrism Mass let us realise in a very special way the wonder of the Sacrament of Holy Orders – that Sacrament which brings Christ to us in the Mass, in the Eucharist – as our priests renew their commitment to priestly service.