

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF OUR LADY OF CONSOLATION, BONNYRIGG

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

SUNDAY 4TH NOVEMBER 2007

INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a privilege being with you today. As you probably know I come to you to fulfil this first engagement in our Archdiocese, following on approximately the last three weeks in Vietnam and in China with a wealth of experiences of the Church in the Far East. However, my concern this morning is to share with you something of your joy in your own particular Church in the East – in the East of our country of Scotland. I am aware of the week of celebrations which have already taken place – I know that memories will remain of this, the daily events which reminded you of the past of your parish, but in a special way reminded you of the living people who make up this parish at the present time.

EARLY HISTORY:

I know that something of the early history of your church and parish is very well known to you following on the other celebrations in which you have taken part – some with myself but most of course with your Parish Priest, Canon Hugh in recent years.

It is the belief of very many people that there was dedication to “Our Lady of Consolation” in this area for very many years, particularly due to the endeavours of the future Archbishop of Glasgow, Robert Blackadder when he was in Rome. We are told that the Pope of the time Pope Sixtus IV near the end of the 15th century granted a petition submitted by Blackadder and issued a bull of foundation for pilgrims, sick folk and poor people as needed care – and the Pope decreed that the hospital should be dedicated as requested to Our Lady under the title of “Our Lady of Consolation”.

This is the earliest appearance of any dedication to Our Lady of Consolation in Scotland – and is the background to the title of our church here in Bonnyrigg.

There were various attempts in the late 1940's to build a church in Bonnyrigg but it was not until there was a great influx of Catholics from the West of Scotland who came to work in the mines of the Lothians in the 1950's that it was decided to build a church here in this area. The initial endeavours were due to Father McArdle who started a building fund for the church while living in the parish house in Park Road. The church was officially opened under the title of Our Lady of Consolation by my predecessor the late Cardinal Gray in 1957.

Father James Gallagher accomplished great work when he succeeded Father McArdle as parish priest – helped successively by Father Carey, Father Hendry and Father McMahan. I myself got to know something of the parish and its history at that time from Canon Jim Gallagher who was a close friend of my own parish priest as a young man growing up in Edinburgh, the late Canon Willie McLaughlin.

The parish continued as an independent parish until 1990 – when your own parish priest, Father White was asked to combine the parishes of Bonnyrigg and Rosewell into Our Lady of Consolation and St Matthew – it is you yourselves who appreciate the success of these endeavours at this present time.

THE CHURCH OF TODAY:

With regard to the Church of today I must speak once more of the beauty of this present building.

Canon Hugh and all of you set about ensuring that this church was not just a bare four walls but was lovingly and tastefully decorated.

I mention in particular the stain glass windows with the central panels on each of the ten windows presenting us with a series of symbols which have traditionally played a part in Christian history. These windows were generously and willingly contributed by individual families in your parish along with the various side panels.

Once might say that your parish church received a wonderful “uplift” materially at the time of your 40th anniversary - and ongoing care and concern is shown for every aspect of the church building.

However, as we well know and as I know you deeply appreciate, a parish is not just simply a building; nor are the important things the bricks and mortar, the wood and stone which go to make up the material of the building.

Each and every one of our parishes is people – and the people of this area with the strength of their faith have worked together evermore effectively with neighbouring parishes as need dictated over the past years.

I have mentioned that Our Lady of Consolation, Bonnyrigg and St Matthew’s, Rosewell were joined in 1990 and St Margaret’s, Gorebridge was joined also in 2005 to create the one community of Our Lady, St Matthew and St Margaret. In your parish profile the union is beautifully described in the following words: **“What were three independent streams of Catholic tradition have now merged to form a wider and richer source of witness and service in Midlothian”**.

And that is indeed what has happened. The way in which three independent communities have been blending into the forming of one community is a tribute to your own goodwill and desire to serve one another in this area under the inspiring leadership of your present Parish Priest, Canon Hugh White.

THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW:

When we look back over the past fifty years I am sure each one of us is amazed at the way in which we have all grown as members of the Church – whether Bishops, Priests or religious or members of the lay faithful. I know that as your Bishop I have been called upon to do things I would never have dreamed possible fifty years ago or indeed would my predecessor, the late much loved Cardinal Gray would ever have dreamt that his successor would be doing some of the things which I am called upon to do nowadays – with regard to my leadership of the Church and indeed all Christians in Scotland and the increasing influence of Scotland throughout the world.

Canon Hugh's predecessors as parish priests in Bonnyrigg and in Rosewell and in Gorebridge found sufficient work in each of these parishes. Now your Parish Priest is expected to be the one priest serving these three parishes – and it is not the same leadership as of old but a leadership involving building up each community so that it can play its best part in the one community of this parish.

And our outreach must not just be within our own Church, we must be fully aware to our outreach to the world.

Recently at an interview with the Media, Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the “witness of the Christian in the world of today” saying during his interview “**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 emphasise those words to you. The responsibility of witnessing to Christ in the world and to uphold his teaching is a heavy responsibility on my shoulders as indeed on those of your Parish Priest, Canon Hugh.

However, we both take strength in the fact that so many of you support us. Further so many of you are able in your own parish communities as well as in your own homes, your workplaces and your places of recreation you are able and willing to speak out on behalf of the teaching of Jesus Christ himself.

CONCLUSION:

This golden jubilee of your present church building must be a time of rejoicing for you all as you think back to the past and the initial naming of your church building under the title of “Our Lady of Consolation” and as you look positively to the future.

I myself dislike always being portrayed as a “negative preacher”. Rather I think I am more than positive in emphasising the goodness of the teaching of Jesus and of our Church!

As Pope Benedict also said recently: “Christianity, Catholicism, is not a collection of prohibitions: **It is a positive option.** It is very important that we look at it again because this idea has almost completely disappeared today”.

Consequently on the occasion of the golden jubilee of your present church building I ask you to be ever more positive about Christianity, about your Church, about your faith!

Like those first apostles of 2000 years ago it is a very positive option which we proclaim and which we must continue to proclaim with all out strength in the face of much opposition in the world of today.

As he strengthened out forefathers in the faith so indeed may God strengthen us at this present time and may that love of Mary which sustained those which have gone before us in the faith continue to sustain us as we continue to do God's will in bringing him and his love to the peoples of our community, to the peoples of Scotland and indeed to the peoples of the world.

