

LENTEN STATION MASSES

LENT 2008

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a privilege for me continuing this Lenten journey throughout our Archdiocese as I have done each year since my appointment as your Archbishop.

I extend a particular welcome to those members of the deanery who are on their own particular journey of faith through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) Programme. I know that many of you managed to be with me in our Cathedral on the First Sunday of Lent for the 'Rite of Election' and that you are now preparing for your journey which will take you into full communion with our Church or through the Sacraments of Initiation into our family of the faith.

In welcoming you here I welcome also those priests, religious and people in your parishes who have inspired you in some way or another and at this present time are helping you on your own particular journeys.

'TAKE IT SERIOUSLY':

If there is one theme which I would take for this particular series of Lenten Station Masses it can be summed up in the words: '**Take it seriously!**'. I am referring to our own particular gift of the faith – but I am also referring to the way in which we, and others throughout the world, live out that faith.

I give some examples in particular:

I have just recently returned from a **pastoral visit to Cambodia** with Mr Paul Chitnis the Chief Executive of our Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF). It is amazing what has been accomplished by those people who have suffered so much during the dreadful civil war some 30 years ago when almost 2 million people were put to death, particularly during the Pol Pot regime. In the country there are three specific areas in each of which there is a Vicar or Prefect Apostolic directing the Church's apostolate – one from France, one Spanish and one Indian. In the whole of Cambodia, there are only about 70 priests, five of whom are Cambodian. The first Cambodian Bishop starved to death at the time of the civil war and now the people are gradually getting back to normal again. This simple pectoral cross which I am wearing was given to me by one of the Prefect Apostolics – the shortened leg on the figure of Jesus on the cross is a reminder of the many thousands of land mines still in Cambodia; and, as he stated, a reminder to the people of how they must still try to make up in their bodies for any lacks in the suffering body of Jesus himself. Catholics bear a wonderful witness in a population of 14 million when they have only about 0.3% of the population in the midst of a people where 90% profess the Buddhist faith – they do indeed take their faith seriously in Cambodia!

I think also of the **Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Kenya**. I myself am increasingly aware of their fears having witnessed the results of the genocide in Rwanda some years previously. The risk of fierce tribal fighting is always around the Sisters in Kenya at this present time; they fear for their people as they fear for themselves.

Just before I departed for Cambodia I received a letter from Sister Placida one of our Dominican Sisters now in Kenya who wrote:

“We were all so touched on hearing the news that our people in Scotland cared so much for our people here in Kenya.

Please pray that the poor people here who have been affected by all of this will be helped to get back to normal and that those who have lost close relatives in all the fighting will be consoled. Please pray to that peace and unity will return to the country and that its leaders will be able to put aside their own selfish ambitions to work together for the good of the Kenyan people. And if you have another prayer to spare please pray that all of us who are trying to help the displaced get the necessary strength to keep going even when things seem so difficult”.

Those Sisters in Kenya are indeed having to take their faith and the practice of their faith evermore seriously at this present time.

‘TAKE IT SERIOUSLY’ IN OUR OWN ARCHDIOCESE:

But my message to you today is to learn from those who are having to take their faith seriously throughout the world to indeed take that message back home here to our own Archdiocese. Basically you cannot take your faith evermore seriously if you simply do not understand what is going on in our Archdiocese at this present time.

To put things very simply:

We have a decreasing number of active priests in our Archdiocese and we have very few students for the Priesthood; many convent of religious sisters have had to close or are thinking of closing at this present time because of the age of the sisters remaining and the lack of vocations to that particular form of life; more and more of the pastoral work of our parishes must evolve on the shoulders of our lay faithful – and **that means each one of you as well as priests and religious taking our faith more seriously!**

At this time we do need ever more a greater Christian vision – for our Church and for our country. Where is the Christian voice if it is not our voice: speaking against **poverty at home and abroad**; supporting the call of successive Popes crying for nuclear disarmament; being a voice of sanity in a world in which sexual excesses are taken for granted and experimentation with regard to life in all its aspects goes on apace and with the apparent approval of all.

Further, we must take seriously **the way we run and administer our Archdiocese**. I recently read an article in which the author wrote: “The past is over. That Church, as we knew it in the past, is dying. The old ways are now ancient history and a new and different Church has to be given life and energy in a new and different world”.

However, what we must remember is that if something is dying, something is also being born. What is dying is a mindset that defines ‘Church’ in one set of terms and can see no other. Consequently, we must build on the strengths of the past and go forward ever more confidently into the future.

If you have indeed followed what is going on in our Archdiocese you will realise that the number of our deaneries has now been reduced from ten to six. You will know that there is now a Bishops Council helping and advising me with my two Vicars General along with the six area Vicars Episcopal who formerly went by the title of “Dean”. You will know that there are six deanery pastoral councils, one for each deanery either already fully constituted or in the process of being constituted whose representatives make up along with myself our Archdiocesan Pastoral Council.

Our Episcopal Council and our Archdiocesan Pastoral Council work together evermore closely ensuring that not only we preserve what has already been achieved in our Archdiocese but that we are evermore ready to continue to “launch out into the deep” and to use the words of our pastoral planning process to go forward “together in hope”.

Our Church must never be a pessimistic Church – and that applies to the Church in our Archdiocese! Those first followers of Our Lord when they realised the magnitude of the task facing them to “go and teach all nations” were not pessimistic about that particular challenge but indeed did what was asked of them by the good Lord and entered into the great challenge facing them to indeed go and teach all nations.

CONCLUSION:

It is our responsibility at this present time to take stock of where we are and go forward together in our pastoral planning for the years which lie ahead.

Consequently in each of our deaneries I do want our parishes to be **clustered** together not only for mutual help and support but to enable them to continue with outreach here in our own country and wherever possible to reach out also abroad. I want those **lead parishes** in each of our clusters under the leadership of enthusiastic priests to consider where best the talents of each person in the deanery can be used to enable the ongoing mission of our Church to continue evermore confidently.

Nothing will be accomplished if we sit back and nostalgically think of the past when priests were able to do so much more on their own because of the greater numbers. I appreciate that many of our priests are already overstretched, not only in their parochial responsibilities but in diocesan and often national responsibilities as well.

I make my call this evening to all of you gathered here at this Lenten Station Mass. My call is quite simply to take your faith more seriously, to take the practice of your faith as something to be considered now and for the years which lie ahead.

At the root of all our pastoral planning there must be a great confidence in what we have already accomplished but also a certainty that much more is being asked of us for the years which lie ahead.

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In the Scriptures we are told that **Jesus resolutely continued on his way to Jerusalem.** There must be that **same determination in each and every one of us** when we give out faith and the practice of the faith that serious consideration which it deserves.

I am sure that all of us here this evening will be inspired by the example of those who on their journey of faith now received the Creed of the Church that Creed which has been the cornerstone of all our own belief in the past as it will be for the future.

May God indeed bless you all and help us working together to go forward together in hope taking our faith which means taking Jesus Christ and his call evermore seriously.