

## **Homily of Cardinal Vincent Nichols given at the Golden Jubilee of Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool on the Solemnity of Pentecost, 4th June 2017**

Golden jubilees are a time for memories. And today is no exception as we celebrate this bold and magnificent Cathedral of Christ the King.

This cathedral enjoys a one-hundred-and-fifty-year history. Its first design was presented in 1853 by Edward Welby Pugin (1834-1875) and became Our Lady Immaculate Parish Church, in Everton. Then came designs by Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) and by Adrian Gilbert Scott (1882-1963), the brother of the architect of the great Anglican cathedral, in Liverpool (Giles Gilbert Scott, 1880-1960). Then we come to 1959, and the competition for 'a cathedral in our time' with 299 entries and the winning design by Sir Frederick Gibberd. So today, we celebrate a history, which discloses much of the story of this city and its Catholic population, always wanting a cathedral landmark and proudly cherishing this cathedral, the largest place of Catholic worship in England and Wales.

But memories, if they are to warm the heart, have to be more personal. As I look around today so many memories come into my mind and heart: the presence here of Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on 22nd June 1977, and the chairs specially made for her visit, her first ever visit to a Catholic cathedral in this country; the gathering of the National Pastoral Congress in 1980; the visit of Pope St John Paul II, in 1982. I remember too, so vividly, the atmosphere in this cathedral, filled to overflowing on the Sunday evening of 16th April 1989, as we waited for an hour, in total silence, for the arrival of Bishop David Sheppard so that we could begin our solemn prayer for all who had died at Hillsborough Football Stadium the previous day, that fateful Saturday. On that day, a bond was formed between the people of this city and this place in a story never forgotten. In its short life, this cathedral has seen so many remarkable events.

And not just events, but people too. Archbishops and Bishops: the fiat of Archbishop Heenan, the joy of Bishop Augustine Harris who consecrated this cathedral, in the presence of Her Royal Highness, Princess Margaret (14th May 1967), the dedicated service of Archbishop George Beck, followed by the most remarkable Archbishop Derek Worlock, keeping an eye on us from just over there. Then, of course, Archbishop Patrick Kelly, and Archbishop Malcolm who presides over this great church with such grace and perception. Artists and musicians: John Piper, Patrick Reyntiens, Elizabeth Frink, Sean Price, Sir James MacMillan, Roger McGough and the Duffy brothers, Terence and Philip. There are others to recall: Sister Anthony and her transforming skills and workshop, the Cathedral Administrators who have borne the burden of everyday effort, and their army of helpers. One other person, too. 1967 saw not only the opening of this cathedral but also the release of the record, Sergeant Pepper. One track comes to mind: 'I'm fixing a hole where the rain gets in and stops my mind from wandering.....' The repairing of the roof and stabilising of this cathedral was a remarkable achievement, fruit of the determined partnership between Archbishop Derek and Monsignor Michael McKenna. It was a great effort, which I hope, is never forgotten.

In the Golden Book of the cathedral, which records the names of all who have contributed to it and promises them prayers, my name can be found, back in the early fifties. We thought that one day the great cathedral might rise. I remember being told that, with a typical Liverpool pride, it would be just a few feet shorter than St Peter's Basilica, in Rome, a gesture to due deference, you understand! I also recall as a boy, singing with great

gusto the hymn 'Hail Redeemer King Divine', without a doubt my boyhood favourite. It was, of course, written for the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the great cathedral in 1930. Its verses still express today our faith in Christ, who alone stands at the centre of all this great history and endeavour.

For us, however, the word memory has a far deeper and more remarkable meaning. Here, in this cathedral as in every Catholic church, we not only remember, but we make real again. Our 'remembering' of the person of Jesus, makes him present to us in his words and actions, in a real and vivid way. At the focal point of every church, seen so vividly as in this cathedral, lies the altar, the place at which the sacrifice of Christ in his death on the Cross is not only remembered but made again a living reality. Here we gather at the foot of that Cross. Here we receive again its fruits: the Father's mercy, our forgiveness.

This living memorial, this memory which makes present, comes about only through the power of the Holy Spirit, whose coming upon the Apostles we celebrate on this day of Pentecost. We heard of that coming and its transforming power in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles and in the Gospel. This power of God first brought order to creation and still sustains all living beings. This power of God changed fearful fishermen into powerful witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus. This power of God which, through his gift, we invoke, changes the bread and wine we place on this altar into the Body and Blood of Christ, our food and drink for the forgiveness of our sins, for the sustaining of our lives as his disciples and for our eternal life. It is this power of God, his Holy Spirit, which is so wonderfully portrayed in that burning, red, stained glass window, whose light floods this altar of sacrifice.

This same Spirit, as St Paul tells us, is poured into our hearts so that the different gifts we have been given may be used for a good purpose and in a manner which is not only harmonious but for the benefit of all. The refracting of this light of the Holy Spirit, into the corona of light and colour of the great lantern here above us, speaks eloquently of how the Holy Spirit is to flood out from here to this city and this County of Lancashire in a spirit of service offered always in the name of our Beloved Lord Jesus.

At the end of this Mass, as at every Mass, we will be sent out to fulfil the task given to us by the Lord. Today as you leave, glancing back towards this great cathedral, please remember that it is built on the site of the Liverpool Workhouse, which stood here from 1771 to 1928. In 1900, for example, over 4,000 poor people were housed on this site, in conditions which were very harsh, even if not quite punitive. Remember, too, that Catholic priests were often refused entry and could not fulfil their ministry to the poorest of their people. These foundations can serve to remind us that our first mission is to those who today are poor and forgotten, who are on the margins, the very ones who are indeed the most beloved of Christ our King. In fulfilling this mission no obstacle, misunderstanding or hostility should ever deflect us from our purpose.

In our thanksgiving and celebration in this Cathedral of Christ the King, we pray that God's Holy Spirit, which transforms base material into divine substance, may fill us and work in our lives, transforming our humble humanity into a noble instrument of God's purpose in our world. In this we will be faithful to our great mission, so well symbolised in this cathedral, an icon of our endeavour and, more importantly, of our faith.

Amen.