

LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESAN CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

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Introduction to Mass and Homily preached by the Most Reverend Patrick Kelly, Archbishop of Liverpool at Mass with Jubilarians marking the closing of the Year of the Priesthood. 7.30 pm on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Friday 11 June 2010, in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool.

Introduction to Mass:

It must be forty years ago that, in the midst of unceasing discussions about the priesthood and identity crises were seen as the norm: I pondered a reflection I have never forgotten. It was by Kark Rahner: his gift: the priest: the man of the pierced heart. It means for me that there is nothing so obvious as on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the heart pierced not so much by a soldier's lance, but by the demands of loving the unlovely, as a fitting day to celebrate jubilees of priestly life and bring to a searching climax the year of the priesthood. All of that the Word of God we will soon receive confirm.

Homily:

The man with the pierced, widely broken open heart; because of the parable we have just received I record these words of the Holy Father when the pallium was conferred upon him at the inauguration of his ministry as successor of the fisherman formed into a shepherd by forgiveness and new loving of his Lord: Simon, son of John: in the Church uniquely founded on the testimony even unto death of two apostles: Simon became Peter and Saul became Paul.

The symbolism of the pallium is even more concrete: the lamb's wool is meant to represent the lost, sick or weak sheep which the shepherd places on his shoulders and carries to the waters of life. For the Fathers of the Church, the parable of the lost sheep, which the shepherd seeks in the desert, was an image of the mystery of Christ and the Church. The human race, every one of us, is the sheep lost in the desert which no longer knows the way. The Son of God will not let this happen; he cannot abandon humanity in so wretched a condition. He leaps to his feet and abandons the glory of heaven, in order to go in search of the sheep and pursue it, all the way to the Cross. He takes it upon his shoulders and carries our humanity; he carries us all: he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. What the pallium indicates first and foremost is that we are all carried by Christ. But at the same time it invites us to carry one another.

The Son of God leapt to his feet. And that compassion, selflessness and creative zeal he would manifest in the life, form, style of every priest.

And he carried those who were lost even as far as the cross: so: 'at his appointed moment Christ died for sinners...what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners'.

And this merciful loving, this loving which God loves 'has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us'. And it is in the measure that we allow this loving, this selfless compassion, to form our whole being, in the words of the overshadowing ordination prayer: 'Innova in visceribus eius Spiritum Sanctitatis'. 'Renew within him the Spirit of holiness': that the words of compassion, mercy to the end, he spoke over and so embodied in bread and wine: body given for you, blood shed for the forgiveness of sin, ring true on our lips. Again in Pope Benedict's words, as those who must receive before we must bestow on others, we are plunged into the dynamism of our Lord's self offering.

And it as reconciled, profoundly at peace ourselves, filled with joyful trust in God whom sin, death, Satan, father of lies and false accuser, cannot silence, that we feel for sheep during the mist and darkness, lost, wounded, straying, weak: or turning again to the Holy Father's words we will feel, be moved by those harassed and dejected in the deserts.

'The pastor must be inspired by Christ's holy zeal: for him it is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of deserts. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life and life in abundance.'

I end with the way to discern the call to priesthood and to be renewed as a priest: two elements: appropriating, pondering, savouring the freedom, challenge, invitation, joy the Lord is to me: the second: the weary crowds: living and partly living: spending: noisily, painfully thrashing after a good time.

Put the two together and pray: 'Here I am Lord send me, and send me again and again'.

And for that yes spoken especially by our jubilarians so that the Lord has said and still says through, with and in them: 'I shall be a true shepherd to them,' today we give all glory and honour to the Father from whom comes all life, all holiness.