

## LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESAN CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

*From the Press Officer:*  
**Peter Heneghan**  
Tel (0151) 522 1007  
Mobile: 07980 821273  
Fax (0151) 522 1008  
Email: [p.heneghan@rcaol.co.uk](mailto:p.heneghan@rcaol.co.uk)



Croxteth Drive  
Sefton Park  
Liverpool  
L17 1AA

Web: [www.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk)

**Homily preached by the Right Reverend John Rawsthorne, Bishop of Hallam, at a Mass of Thanksgiving celebrating Golden Jubilees of Ordination. 12.00 noon on Saturday 8 June 2013 in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool.**

*The Mass was celebrated with Father Victor Bridges, Monsignor Anthony Dennick, Father John Gildea, Canon Joseph Kelly, Father Peter Kelly, Monsignor Michael McKenna, Canon Patrick MacNally, Father Peter Morgan, and Father Joseph Robinson who were ordained to the priesthood on 8 June 1963 at St Joseph's College, Upholland.*

Its lovely to be back and its lovely to be back on such an occasion as this. I have to confess that I would be embarrassed not to say how I find myself here today and you wonder how somebody has come from the other side of the Pennines for this occasion. I need to say a warm thank you to the Jubilarians for the invitation to be with you today, and to Archbishop Kelly, Bishop Tom and Bishop Vincent for their warm welcome.

In answer to the question 'why me?' I have to say that I have known five of these jubilarians for 63 years. We were just out of short pants when we first met in the school at Upholland. I've known the others for 56 years. It is a long time with great friendships and I should add that they were one of the largest groups that ever went through the school at Upholland and I belong to the smallest group that ever went through the school at Upholland and they with a generosity of heart, which they've shown ever since, welcomed my year into their fellowship and we've shared reunions and all sorts of things with them over the last 50 years.

It is a moment for me in congratulating them to say a profound 'thank you' for what they have meant to me over those fifty years. Tomorrow I will be celebrating with two priests who are golden jubilarians in a Diocese with which I am now associated and they were classmates in Lisbon with Father Victor Bridges, so he is very much part of that network.

Each one of our Golden Jubilarians today has made a very significant contribution to the life of the Church in this Diocese and in some cases to the life of the Church in this country. I hope that each of them can look back today and thank God for what those fifty years have meant to them. The rest of us are certainly here to thank God for what those fifty years in their lives have meant to us.

Recently at a Diocesan Assembly in the other Diocese with which I am closely associated, we had a morning on spirituality. The question posed was 'how does God attract our attention?' A good question; instead of counting sheep tonight think of that question; 'How does God attract our attention?' It nudged me to think that a question that might be asked on an

occasion like this is 'how does God sustain, support and grow priests through their fifty years of ministry?' I think that the answer to that question is to be found substantially in this Cathedral this morning: in what we are about and in who we are. I have never known a group of Golden Jubilarians concelebrate a major Jubilee Mass before and I think it is a simply wonderful idea. This is the heart of what their priestly ministry has been about, never as an individual priest with an individual congregation. It was David Sheppard, former Bishop of Liverpool, whom I heard reminding people on one occasion that at every Mass everywhere in the world the local Bishop is mentioned and the Pope is mentioned, the local Church and the universal Church. One of those wonderful, mysterious little moments of the Mass which I have never really, I confess, understood is the breaking of a little tiny piece of the host and dropping it into the chalice I think its origins are in that sense of universal Church that the chalice was sent from the Church here to the Church next door as a sign of fellowship and of unity in Christ, so however alone we seem to be we are always Church. To come together as people of the parishes and the priests who are celebrating their jubilee today to celebrate what is at the heart of our existence from which the other sacraments spread out is simply wonderful.

We are a pilgrim people and the heart of pilgrimage is walking and talking and praying together. The whole of our life as Christians is pilgrimage: we walk together, conscious of each other, conscious of the part we play in each other's lives. I always think that it is precisely in those relationships that the Holy Spirit is so focally present. I want to say today that God sustains supports and grows these jubilarian priests through their relationships. First of all, because those relationships go back well over fifty years in their relationships with each other. The other Diocese in my life is a small Diocese and every priest knows every other priest and they know their weaknesses and their strengths, they know their quirks and their idiosyncrasies; they know the same of the Bishop as well let it be said. What I say with great joy, is that they work to each other's strengths, they don't work to each other's weaknesses. In these relationships which go back so very far, which began when we were boys, when we kicked footballs together and we kicked each other in the process, which have been robust relationships over many years, often jokey relationships, underneath it over all those years there has been that work of the Spirit in each of us, through each of us, shaping us and sustaining us. I do believe, truly, that it is only when we come to God finally that we will know what a huge part other people have played in our lives and those people will not know that they have played those parts, just as we are not conscious of the part they have played. Wherever Christian people gather together as disciples of Jesus there is a sort of osmosis that works from one to another. As you grow older you can look back further and I can now recognise from my young days at my own parish the people who shaped me. The people whom I instinctively recognised as people of prayer, the people with huge generosity, the people with a sense of Church. The people who have one foot in the Church and one foot in the world, who were bridge builders. I recognise also the way in which my priest friends and companions have influenced me over the years, not least these jubilarians to whom I would feel I have had good friendship over all those years. I am different because of that, so there is a sense in which I hope that each of them today is thanking God for each other and for the contribution each other has made to the shape of the priest that is today celebrating his golden jubilee. I say that first of all of them as priests and priest companions on that journey but I want to extend that. Every one of us is here today because in some way they have touched our lives, but we have touched their lives and you will not know how you have touched it. You will not know in what ways your prayers have made a crucial difference to the life of that priest, but I believe they often will have done.

The journey we have all walked over the past fifty years has never been an easy journey either at a personal level, at the level of the Church widely or at the level of the Church in which we live. The way in which those three inter connect: our priests today were ordained in the second year of the Vatican Council, we were ordained celebrating Mass in Latin with our backs to the people, celebrating all the sacraments in Latin. Our early years were years of immense change and they were years when leadership, and feeling safe with the new Church that the Council called into being was crucial. On our own not one of us is capable of that, we are sustained by each others prayers.

Cardinal Heenan wrote a book called 'The Peoples Priest'. Priest without people does not make sense, priest with people is what it is about. People who support and journey with us, these are the priests who faced those years of fall out around 'Humanae Vitae', who had to advise and encourage people in the confessional and in other situations. It was not an easy time.

These are the priests who were ordained at the time when Mass attendance in England and Wales was at its highest since 1850. There was a gradual increase, it was over 50% Mass attendance in the early 60s. We were ordained into that Church, it was a Church that had a sense of security which was really very insecure. It was a Church which was about to begin a gentle slide, certainly in Mass attendance so that it is probably now about what it was in the 1850s, 60s and 70s when our then Bishop of Liverpool wrote a Pastoral Letter in which he said, 'every Sunday in this Diocese one in four Catholics goes to Mass', that is a different world.

These are the priests who have coped with increasing numbers of single parent families. They are coping now with the wonderful fact of Catholic immigration into this country, but it brings its language difficulties, its customs difficulties, it brings its liturgical difficulties. In India there are three different Catholic Churches, all of them in union with the Pope: the Latins, the Syro-Malabars and the Syro-Malankaras and we have all of them in our Diocese. We want to make them welcome and we want them not to lose their own customs. We struggle with it.

Our Lady in today's Gospel found herself faced with the mystery of this Son of hers and she kept these things with concern in her heart. She was the disciple who walks knowing that they will never know the mind of God but that God is part of their very existence. Mary places herself in the hands of her Father by the power of the Spirit and in union with her Son.

I think that a key element of thanksgiving today has to do with faithfulness. God's faithfulness to these jubilarians over the last fifty years, but a faithfulness that is made flesh very substantially in the lives of those with whom we live and work and whom we serve. If I say to them today 'ad multos annos' may God bless you in the years that lie ahead, I say to you thank you for being part of that journey which we now celebrate. Amen.

**Ends**  
**8 June 2013**