

**HOMILY AT MASS GIVEN BY CARDINAL SEÁN BRADY,
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH AND PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND.**
"Every Moral Choice we Make, No Matter How Small, has Consequences"
DUBLIN 14 JUNE 2012

Opening Remarks

A phobail dhil Dé, cuirim fíorchaoín fáilte romhaibh chuig an Aifreann seo ina ndéanaimid macnamh ar an Eocairist agus ar athmhuintearas.

My sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, it is a great joy to gather for this celebration of the Eucharist with all of you who are here in the Congress Arena in Dublin and all of you who are watching on television and the internet, or who are listening on radio. Here in the Congress Arena thousands of pilgrims have come together from over 100 countries across the world. This is the fifth day of the 50th International Eucharistic Congress. It is the day when we reflect on the relationship between the Eucharist and Reconciliation. It is also the day when we celebrate the Eucharist in the language and music of the Irish tradition. I want to welcome you all, especially those of you for whom this is the first time to hear the Mass celebrated in the original language of the Irish people. We hope that through the universal language of sign, symbol and gesture of our Catholic liturgy, which is itself a source of our communion with Christ and with one another, you will enter with us in to these sacred mysteries.

That we may be worthy to receive these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins and ask the Lord for his pardon and strength.

HOMILY

My sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ,

What a great joy it is to come together to listen to God's Word and to experience the beautiful, peaceful presence of the Lord in this Eucharist *and* in our communion with one another. As I have been walking around the Congress Campus, as I meet you on the streets nearby, I am moved by the great spirit of joy and peace and helpfulness to one another that are so present among us.

We should not be surprised. These *are* the fruits of the Blessed Eucharist. They are the simple, practical gifts of goodness, kindness, neighbourliness and joy that flow from the presence of Christ himself among us. They really do change the world. They are the fruits of the Eucharist that, every day, help us to become active citizens in building up the civilisation of love that Jesus our Lord calls us to be.

Each time we have gathered to celebrate the Eucharist here at the Congress, I am sure like me, your eyes were drawn to this beautiful icon of Jesus just behind me. You will have noticed the four words that radiate out towards us from the book of the Gospels – *Ego sum, pastor bonus – I am the Good Shepherd*. These are incredible words! The depth of love and devotion for each one of us that they convey is without equal. *I am the Good Shepherd*. I know my own sheep and they know me. I know each one by name. I lay down my life for my sheep, so that they might have life and have it to the full.

My dear friends, there are few of us in whom the story of the lost sheep does not find an echo. Who among us has not gone astray at some moment in our lives? Who among us has not chosen our own path rather than the Lord's? Who among us has not experienced the pain of separation or loneliness? Who among us does not know what it is to be afraid? Who among us does not carry the burden of regret for past wrongs?

Today we turn our attention to what Blessed Pope John Paul II called on his visit to Dublin in 1979, 'that other sacrament of God's love, the sacrament of reconciliation'. It is here that the parable of the lost sheep becomes real for us. In our Gospel reading, St Matthew tells us that Jesus, the Good Shepherd will always seek us out when we have gone astray. He is constantly searching for us. If we are open to his help, he will always lead us home to the place where we really belong. He will heal our wounds. He will calm our fears. He will restore our lost innocence. He will bring us here, to the Eucharist, to the perfect sacrifice of reconciliation. In it, through his infinite mercy and love, we are restored to communion with him and with one another.

When we sin, we not only disrupt our innermost self, we also disrupt our relationship with Christ and with one another. The work of reconciliation embraces all these dimensions of the consequences of sin – the personal, the social and the impact on the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

This is why, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the effect of personal sin on us and on the whole Church is considered. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest acts in the name of Christ. He also acts in the name of the Church.

It is through the power of Christ that the Sacrament of Penance mends the broken bonds between individuals and God and between individuals and the body of Christ, the Church. It also helps to restore the bonds of mutual affection, peace and accord within society. In the words of the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation which we are about to pray, it is the Lord who changes our hearts 'to prepare them for reconciliation': it is the Holy Spirit who moves human hearts so that 'enemies speak to each other again, adversaries join hands... hatred is overcome by love, revenge gives way to forgiveness, and discord is changed to mutual respect'.

Jesus has willed that his Church should continue this work – his work of healing and forgiveness, and shepherding - especially among her own members.

He knew well that the life he came to give – life as a child of God - can be weakened and even lost by sin. That is why he left us the Sacrament of Confession where we can get pardon from God's mercy for the sins we have committed.

My brothers and sisters, in our First Reading Saint James warns us of the danger of deceiving ourselves, of knowing God's word and not putting it in to practice. He compares this to looking at ourselves in a mirror and then quickly forgetting what we look like. How easy it can be to forget God's commandments and to live as though God does not exist. When we sin, we distort God's image within us, the image and likeness in which we are made. Sin is not a very popular word in our culture. Evil is often thought of as something rare and extreme, if it is believed to exist at all. Yet history tells us time and time again, that a loss of a sense of sin, or the belief that evil is just an extreme to which I have no connection, can have serious consequences.

Jesus spoke of sin as something that causes us to stumble, something that trips us up on the journey of life. It suggests the image of a loose stone on a path, or a jagged rock on a mountain climb. It reminds me of this stone which I have in my hand. It is a small stone. Yet if this stone could speak it would tell a story of the most incredible and dramatic evil. It would tell of how it felt the cold, weary feet of frightened children, women and men of every age as they were walked to their death at Auschwitz, where this stone was found. This stone reminds me of how the simple idea, that 'God is dead', had enormous and profoundly evil consequences. It was put forward by the philosopher Nietzsche. It later gave rise to the evil idea that a whole race of people should be eliminated, the consequences of which were one of the most tragic events in human history.

There is a much larger stone that sits in a place of honour here before this altar. It will serve as a reminder of those children and young people who were hurt by a Church that first betrayed their trust and then failed to respond adequately to their pain. The words of the Gospel echo in my mind: 'It is not the will of your Father that any of these little ones should be lost'. May God forgive us for the times when we as individuals and as a Church failed to seek out and care for those little ones who were frightened, alone and in pain because someone was abusing them. That we did not always respond to your cries with the concern of the Good Shepherd is a matter of deep shame. We lament the burdens of the painful memories you carry. We pray for healing and peace for those whose suffering continues.

I want to take this opportunity of the 50th International Eucharistic Congress to apologise for the times when some of us were blind to your fear, deaf to your cries and silent in response to your pain. My prayer is that one day this stone might become a symbol of conversion, healing and hope. I hope it will become a symbol of a Church that has learned from the mistakes of the past and strives to become a model for the care and well-being of children. What this stone represents, what has happened in the Church in Ireland and in other places in the world, is a stark warning to all that there can be no passing by on the other side, no room for half-heartedness in our care for the vulnerable and the young.

Every moral choice we make, no matter how small, has consequences. The smallest act of kindness can bring good far beyond our expectations. The smallest act of selfishness can contribute to a wider culture of evil and death that has harmful consequences far beyond our intentions. So every time I choose good, instead of evil, 'I somehow raise up the whole world' (*RP*, n.16). As Pope Benedict said, 'Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone' (*Spe Salvi*, n.48).

The human heart is a place of great beauty and compassion. It is a place from which the greatest acts of human love can flow. Yet, disturbed by sin, the heart can also be a place of turbulence and darkness. It is a place where the smallest and the most terrible acts of evil can also be born.

The importance of conversion as a journey has a long and honoured place in the Irish Christian tradition. The inner journey of conversion has often been symbolised by undertaking a difficult, penitential walk with others. Many of you here will be familiar with the *Camino* in Spain.

On Tuesday and Wednesday past, our Papal Legate, Cardinal Ouellet visited Saint Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg. It is there that thousands of people every year fast and pray and walk around the island and penitential beds, often barefoot. The Congress Bell down beside the lectern, was carried by a group of young people from the Diocese of Tuam to the top of Croagh Patrick. Over 100,000 people every year make this two and a half thousand feet rocky climb, sometimes in their bare feet, as an outward sign of an inward spiritual journey of repentance and reconciliation.

Various groups have walked around Dublin and from outside Dublin in penitential pilgrimage in preparation for and during this Congress. I am thinking of the inter-denominational pilgrimage to the seven Churches around Dublin.

I am thinking too of the pilgrimage that set out two weeks ago from Bangor, Co Down: Bangor, a place renowned for its association with Saint Columbanus and Saint Gall. I am thinking also of another pilgrimage that set out from Old Mellifont at 4 a.m. this morning: Mellifont associated with Saint Bernard and Saint Malachy. These penitential pilgrimages symbolise the journey which we all must make from the place where we deceive ourselves in to thinking we have no sin, to the place of conversion. This conversion is the journey of a contrite heart, drawn and moved by God's grace, a journey to respond to the merciful love of God who has loved us first.

We give thanks for the reconciliation that has already taken place in so many hearts here today. One of my hopes for this Congress is that more and more enemies will begin to speak to one another, more and more adversaries may shake hands and more and more opponents may try and meet and simply talk. Another and great hope is that more and more people will meet Jesus the Good Shepherd in Confession, for he is the Word that

makes peace, the hand that is extended to all, the way by which the Father shows his mercy to the world.

For in every Mass the body and blood of the Lord is given to us, that we may live like him in our time and place, bringing his compassionate love to all those we meet. A supreme example of this is the story of a British soldier who was involved in the liberation of a concentration camp. He tells of how, walking through the camp, his attention was drawn to two packing cases covered by a worn red curtain. A young Polish priest was clinging to this makeshift altar with one hand, while celebrating Mass. Between his feet lay the body of another priest, who had died during the night. No one had the energy to move the body.

Although an Anglican, the soldier had a working knowledge of the rituals of the Mass. Telling the story in his own words, he said:

Still supporting himself against the altar, the young priest did his best to distribute the consecrated elements. Some recipients were able to stumble over the rough, scrubby ground of the camp. Others crawled forward to receive communion and then crawled back to share it with others unable to move. Some almost certainly passed on to another - probably better - world before sunset. Whatever one's race or religion – the soldier said - one can only be uplifted and impressed by that truly remarkable proof of the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Every celebration of the Eucharist is indeed a 'truly remarkable proof of the ultimate triumph of good over evil'. Every Eucharist rolls away that heaviest of all stones, the stone in our heart that keeps us back from friendship with Christ and with one another. Every Eucharist proclaims 'Christ is risen – Our God is alive!' He lives in you and in me. Through His Holy Eucharist he continues to reconcile us to one another. In the memorial of his passion and death, made present in every Eucharist, he continues to reconcile the whole world to himself. Let us therefore be reconciled with God. Let us bring that reconciliation to others. For in this is our peace; in this lies the greatest hope for our world.