

**Meditation at Morning Prayer by
Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh.**

"Communion in Marriage and Family Life."

DUBLIN - 12 JUNE 2012

INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a privilege being with you all this morning as our thoughts are directed to those beautiful words from St Paul in the letter to the Colossians (Chapter 3, verses 12 to 15).

In this passage we are reminded of our call by God and of the ways in which God indeed cares for each one of us. St Paul describes us as the "chosen of God"; and because of this particular calling reminds us of the ways in which we should live our lives.

In some ways Paul looks back to that equally beautiful passage in the Acts of the Apostles when those followers of Jesus realised the demands which were being made on them because of their own particular call as children of God. Then we are told in chapter 2 verses 42 and onwards that: "These remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the Brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers....the faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed".

APPLICATION OF ST PAUL'S TEACHING TO OUR LIVES:

I think we can apply this teaching of St Paul and of the followers of Jesus in the early Church to ourselves in three ways:

1. Our welcome into the family of the Church.

Yes, surely that is the way in which we initially serve out our lives as followers of Jesus Christ – as members of that body of Christ in to which most of us were baptised in our infancy. It is in a particular family that we live with others, that we share with others, that in a particular way we share the other sacraments following from our reception of that initial sacrament of baptism. Strengthened throughout our lives by that sacramental life how can we be anything but those 'chosen of God' of whom St Paul speaks. No wonder that the late Blessed John XXIII, when asked about the most important moment in his life, did not describe his ordination to the priesthood, nor indeed any wonderful events during his Pontificate, but rather stated that the greatest moment of his life was when he was brought to his little village church by his parents for baptism and became one of those 'chosen of God'.

2. Our welcome into our human family.

Obviously no person can live an independent life especially at the beginnings of his life. We are all born as members of a particular family with our own parents. The union is

dedicated in the Sacrament of Matrimony, a union well prepared for and to last until natural death causes our father and mother to part. We have a place in a family which has had certain roots going far back in to the distant past and hopefully a family which will stretch out again over the decades in to a greater extended family.

We do indeed affect other around us but particularly within the communion of our family life. It is within the family circle that we are initially brought to appreciate something of the love of God and experience the love of others; it is within the family circle that we learn to speak to one another as well as speaking to God in our prayers; and it is within that same family circle that we appreciate the bonds which bind us together as members of our earthly family preparing us for entry in to our heavenly family. I give you a quotation from a Jesuit priest, Father Emile Mersch SJ, which reminds us of this:

“A person is joined to the whole human race as regards and past and the present. The same is true as regards the future. Each individual has a far-reaching, multiple indefinable influence on the people of the future, for each individual by all his words and deeds swell the current that transfers to future generations the immense heritage of the past”.

3. Our entry into the whole human race of which we are a part.

As Christians more than ever before we should always remember that we are members of the wider family of the society in which we live in the particular countries from which we come. As we are also reminded in the words of sacred scripture “the life and death of each of us has an influence on others” and a Christian influence must always be exerted by us on those who are around us in society – our neighbours at home, our colleagues at work, those with whom we find recreation, and those eventually with whom we grow old.

Society in general often does not have the high standards which the Christian has but nevertheless we must try to impart something of our own standards and of our own ways of life to those around us. St Paul writes of “heartfelt compassion, generosity and humility, gentleness and patience”. These must be among the virtues which we live and which we hand on to others.

And as Christians in the world of today we must never hesitate about not only living our standards but of bravely handing them on to others. As St Paul also says regarding our preaching and living out the Gospel, it must be: “In season and out of season, welcome or unwelcome!”. And, of course, Pope Benedict XVI when in the United Kingdom some 18 months ago and speaking to the dignitaries in Westminster Hall, stressed then: “Religion is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation. In this light, I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalisation at religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in the nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance”.

CONCLUSION:

Remembering those words of Pope Benedict, we must also realise that marriage, as we have always known it, of one man and one woman in a union of love forever, with the hope of bringing children into the world, is not a problem for the rest of society. Family life, with mother and father, parents and children, living together in peace and harmony, is not a problem for legislators to solve. Rather our communion in marriage and family life must always continue to be what it always has been, namely the greatest building block of a stable society and one of which we are in greater need than ever in our troubled world.

May our inspiration from being together as Christians in the family of the Church at this Eucharistic Congress, strengthen us in every way in which we need help at this time – especially aware, as we are, that we continue to be chosen members of the family of God, of our earthly family, and of that family around us in the whole of society as members of the one human race.