

Homily

**Farewell and Welcome
Mass of Thanksgiving**

Tuesday 23rd July 2019

St Joseph's Cathedral Swansea

When I was at school, the de la Salle Brothers taught us that we should say our prayers with the bible in one hand and the newspaper on the other. Perhaps today it should be the internet, or Facebook, or twitter or whatever is your favoured form of social communication. The point being that one purpose of prayer is to bring together the different worlds which we all inhabit in the one life of each person. Our prayer brings together, integrates, makes whole, and even holy, the outer world of public perception with the inner world of personal identity, our hope, aspirations, our failures and our fears.

The scripture readings at this evening's Mass help us do precisely that. Moses, the hero of the People of Israel. Leading them from slavery in Egypt. Liberating them from the worship of so many false gods. Guiding them into a land of their own where freedom to worship the One True God would be the hallmark of their lives. Even so far as resting on the Sabbath Day. True freedom! But things did not go as planned. Disobedience and dissatisfaction caused the people to murmur against Moses. Because there were no instant solutions, no clear roadmaps, and no small discomfort during their forty years of wandering in the desert, they started to demand they go back to their former slavery in Egypt.

Disobedience is always punished in the Bible, from Adam and Eve through the Book of Deuteronomy and beyond. Tonight's reading tells us that their disobedience and lack of faith in their leader meant that he himself would lead them to the Promised Land but he would not enter it himself. The Promised Land is no earthly paradise. "We have here no abiding city. Our homeland lies in heaven". (Hebrews 13:14) That is why we often pray that we may keep our feet firmly on the earth and our eyes fixed on the things of heaven.

St. Paul was clear on the privilege and pitfalls of leadership as was Moses. Travelling on his missionary journeys and forming and encouraging small Christian communities in Galatia, Corinth, Phillipae and elsewhere, he was well aware of factionalism and the cult of personality. What then is Apollos? Who then is Paul? Why Tom Burns? Where does George Stack come from? Leadership and service, fidelity and fruitfulness are not questions of likes and dislikes, personalities or prejudice. As we heard this evening: "One plants. Another waters. God gives the growth. You are God's field. You are God's building. We are all God's fellow workers".

The question asked of Peter by Jesus is addressed to every disciple, and every person who follows Him today. "Do you love me?". When linked to this occasion, and to the person of Bishop Tom Burns, it becomes even more significant. "Lord, you know that I love you" Bishop Tom has replied all through his ministry and his life. "I would not have joined a Religious Order if I did not love you. I would not have responded to your call to serve you as a priest if I did not love you. I would not have left the professional and happy and fulfilled life as Bishop to the Forces if I did not love you. I would not have served the people of Menevia for the last eleven years with the whole of my being if I did not love you". In serving the people of this Diocese Bishop Tom has been inspired by the love shown by parents to their children who are the messages we send to tomorrow. When children ask their parents in verbal and non-verbal ways "Do you love me" the parents answer is made in the self-sacrificing love of family life – the treasure at the heart of the Church

The second part of the reading is equally significant for tonight's Mass of Thanksgiving. "When you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked. But when you are old, someone else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go". I assure you, in inviting Bishop Tom to live in the Diocese of Cardiff, I have not put a belt around him and led him where he would rather not go to his retirement home! Over the years he has been a support and adviser to me in so many ways. I look forward to continuing our friendship in the years to come. Already he is planning to help out wherever needed both in Menevia and in Cardiff. The many charities and organisations he has supported both within and outside the Church are clamouring to keep him on their books.

And what your new Apostolic Administrator? "What is your vision" is the first thing people ask of a new bishop, or head-teacher or manager. I take my example from Pope Benedict on his inauguration as Bishop of Rome:

"It is not for me to present a program of governance at this stage. My real program of governance is not to do my own will, to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history". The Holy See has informed me that shortly I shall receive an 'Instructio' as to my roles and responsibilities as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Menevia. On receiving that, I shall meet the priests of the Diocese in September to listen to their situation and to support them in their work and plan for the future. Once again, I repeat my words in the Joint Statement made by Bishop Tom and myself:

"I will also strongly encourage the positive pastoral initiatives and administrative developments already underway in the Diocese to ensure that the parishes of Menevia may be missionary and vibrant and in a state of readiness for the future".

In a few moments time, Bishop Tom will remove his Episcopal Coat of Arms from above the Cathedra from where he has taught the faith in the last eleven years. But the memory of his motto will remain long after the plaque is removed. "Non Ministrari sed Ministrare". To serve and not to be served. You and I will know from personal experience how he has lived up to that motto. And I hope, in my way, to live up to my own motto whilst I am with you. "Caritas Christi Urget Nos". The love of Christ urges us on.

Thank you, Bishop Tom, for being a servant of Christ's people for all these years. Thank you for serving and not being served in the years that have passed. Thanks to you for your offer of service in the years that lie ahead.

AD MULTOS ANNOS