

Closing Mass of St Martin of Tours Parish, Castlemilk
November 7 2010

My dear people of St Martin's

I am here to join with you in celebrating your half century of faithful witness, while at the same time sharing your sorrow that a chapter in the life of this community is now ending.

Today is not the end of the *story* of faith in this area. It is rather the end of the *chapter* in which this parish and its church building have served as the focus of your life as Christians.

When you leave here for the last time I want you to be very proud of what has been achieved in St Martin's parish over the last 50 years – proud of all that you and your families and friends have done and experienced here. But I want you also to be excited about the possibilities that await you in your new life as parishioners either of St Margaret Mary's or St Bartholomew's.

I know that the people of those parishes are awaiting you with great enthusiasm and a big welcoming heart, and with a little effort I am convinced that you will soon be feeling very much part of those newly enlarged and strengthened parishes serving Castlemilk.

The story of St Martin's Parish is largely mirrored in the story of Castlemilk itself. The first residents moved into Castlemilk's new streets and houses in 1955. That same year the first parish was founded, St Bartholomew's. Two years later St Margaret Mary's came into being and in 1958 this site on Ardencraig Road was obtained to build a third church – dedicated to St Martin of Tours.

Castlemilk was conceived by the planners as one of four developments on the outskirts of the city. Families who were displaced from inner city clearances were moved to these new houses, built with open spaces, and plenty of fresh air. Every house had its own bathroom and it was all so different from the overcrowded tenements many people came from.

That first full decade of the 1960s represented the "glory days" of Castlemilk and of this parish. Perhaps some of you here today can recall that great optimism as the whole area came together and started creating a real community spirit and a real parish identity.

The priest responsible for the building of this church was Fr Jeremiah O'Flynn and the architects were Jack Coia and Izzy Metzstein of the firm of Gillespie, Kidd and Coia. The outstanding character of the design won it listing among churches of historical and architectural excellence, but the failed quality of its materials and of its weather-worthiness has resulted in its present poor condition.

The same could be said of the housing as a whole which began to develop the same problems as the other peripheral 'schemes'. Poor initial planning meant isolation and a lack of such basic amenities such as schools and shops. Over the next 20 years the area gradually declined. The housing was poorly maintained and soon in need of upgrading.

The decline of local industries led to a rise in unemployment and social problems developed. People began to move away and between 1971 and 1991 the population of 37,000 fell by almost a half.

Today with a Mass going population of less than 100 we have to face the inevitable fact that the burden of maintaining this large, listed property cannot be borne by this community, and nor is the number of parishioners sufficient to fulfil all that would be asked of it in future, pastorally, liturgically or financially.

Nonetheless, we gather today to thank God for all that has been achieved and to ask his blessing on our future as the parish is integrated into the much larger congregations of St Bartholomew's and St Margaret Mary's. I want to thank Fr Willie Monaghan who has been appointed to serve in another parish and who has served you so faithfully for so long. I know that he will always bear fond memories of St Martin's in his heart and I hope that you too will always remember him in your prayers.

I know too that your new parish priests, Fr Wallace in St Bartholomew's and Fr Savage in St Margaret Mary's are very much looking forward to welcoming you into their congregations and are determined to help you in every way they can to settle in.

Today's readings speak to us of trust in times of difficulty ... the kind of trust that is now required of you, my dear people, as you leave this place behind – a trust in God and a trust in your own ability and fidelity.

In the psalm we heard the words which could so easily be written of you as a community ... "I kept my feet firmly in your paths; there was no faltering in my steps ... Hide me in the shadow of your wings."

In the epistle St Paul speaks to us in that very direct way of his, which, on this occasion we can consider as being addressed directly to you in the new situation you find yourselves in:

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such inexhaustible comfort and such sure hope, comfort you and strengthen you in everything good that you do or say.”

And he continues: “The Lord is faithful, and he will give you strength and guard you from the evil one, and we, in the Lord, have every confidence that you are doing and will go on doing all that we tell you. May the Lord turn your hearts towards the love of God and the fortitude of Christ.”

This Mass brings together so many emotions, and not least, I imagine, will be the memory of those valiant parishioners who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith ... our parents and grandparents, our friends and relatives who made St Martin's so special to each of you

In this month which the Church reminds us to pray for the dead we can take heart from the words of the Gospel. There Jesus reminds us that our dear loved ones who have gone before us “can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are sons of God ... he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.”

And so with these words of hope we continue with this Mass of thanksgiving.

We thank God for the life of this parish, for the life of its parishioners, and we beg his assistance as we enter the new community life to which we now commit ourselves.

As we leave, let us determine never to forget St Martin's.

And perhaps as a practical means of that can I recommend that you add the intercession “St Martin of Tours, pray for us” to your night prayers.

That heavenly intercessor will not fail to comfort you and intercede for you as you continue on your pilgrimage through life.