

HOMILY FOR VISIT TO ST BERNADETTE'S CARNTYNE

September 12 2010

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the great joys of my life as a bishop is to be able to visit parishes on a regular basis and share with them the milestones in the life of each community.

Sometimes I am invited on the occasion of a jubilee, or an anniversary, or perhaps on the parish's patronal feast.

But today I have not come for any of those reasons, but rather – to use the words of Christ to Peter – “to confirm you in your faith.”

The life of a parish, rather like that of an individual, can undergo profound changes, some of them quite unexpected, leaving a community to adjust as best it can to the new reality.

In recent days I have had experienced two such situations as I celebrated firstly with the people of Blessed John Duns Scotus in the Gorbals the re-opening of their church after it was largely destroyed by fire, and more recently with the people of St Benedict's Drumchapel, whose parish church had to be demolished almost 20 years ago and who have survived without their own purpose-built church during all of that time.

And how can I come here to St Bernadette's without recognising that you too have been through a period of change and adaptation through the recent linkage between your parish and that of your larger neighbour St Thomas's.

That change of having to live without your own resident parish priest has been eased by the hard work of Canon McBride, the presence in the former presbytery of a community of Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the ministry of your own permanent Deacon, Kenny McGeachie.

I pay tribute to them today for the work they do to keep the parish of St Bernadette thriving.

And so I come to bring you encouragement, and to thank you for adapting to these new arrangements which have become necessary due to the shortage of clergy to fill all the parishes in the Archdiocese.

Today though I also come to bless and dedicate for you a new and handsome addition to the furnishings of this church of St Bernadette, the fine painting, entitled “The Healing Power of the Sacraments” by the artist Sarah Bookless.

How fitting that today’s readings should speak of sacred images ... pointing out the right and wrong understanding of them.

The people of Israel made themselves a golden calf to worship – seeing it as a kind of substitute for the worship of God. That is indeed a mis-use of art and a danger to people’s faith.

But the Catholic Church treasures sacred art and sees it, not as an obstacle to God, but rather as a means of drawing closer to Him. That is why the Church through the centuries has been a great patron of sacred art, seeing it as an aid to people’s faith and devotion and an ennobling element of life.

The painting which you will now have as your own, is in that tradition. You might see it as a kind of visual sermon. It contains so much theology ... At the centre of the cosmos is Christ. Christ is present really and substantially in the sacred host offered in the sacrifice of the Mass. People of our time gather round that sacrifice, each one representing a sacrament, each sacrament itself an outward sign of inward grace...

The painting speaks of so much that we need to remember ... the importance of the Eucharist at the heart of our lives; the importance of the sacraments as means for drawing closer to God; solidarity between people of all ages and

conditions; the dignity of the priesthood ... and at its centre, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Today's Gospel is also rich in imagery. Imagery of a different kind. We are offered the stories of the lost sheep, the lost drachma, the prodigal son ... all of them quite different, but each making the same point in a different way.

That point can be summed up as this: God loves us with a love that we cannot begin to understand, and will go to any lengths to reach out to us and find us, bringing us back when we stray.

In just a few days time we will have the immense privilege of welcoming Pope Benedict XVI to our midst. His message for us will be one we will treasure for years to come, just as we treasured the words of Pope John Paul 28 years ago.

Ahead of the Holy Father's visit we cannot know what he will say to us, but on this occasion I want to leave you with a previous quote from Pope Benedict, one he delivered on the day he was enthroned as Bishop of Rome.

He said: "Each of us is the result of a thought of God, each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

That, I think, is a very succinct and beautiful summary of the message contained in today's Gospel.

May that message continue to echo in your hearts and minds in the years to come, and may the painting we bless today inspire you to draw ever closer to God, really present, on this altar at the heart of your community.

Amen