

## **Golden Jubilee of St. Ninian's Knightswood**

**7<sup>th</sup> December 2009**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the eve of the lovely Feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception we are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of this lovely church of Saint Ninian's in Knightswood.

"I exalt for Joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God; for he has clothed me in the garment of salvation and robed me in the cloak of justice, like a bride adorned with her jewels". The words of the introit, the opening antiphon, of today's solemn Mass can be applied both to our Blessed Lady, and also to the Church, which in the solemn rite of consecration is described as the Spouse of Christ. This description is justified because the church as a building gathers into itself the community of God's people, whom the Father loves. The image in the apocalypse of the woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head can stand both for Our Lady and the Church, which is also described as coming down out of heaven, all beautiful dressed as a bride for her husband.

It is therefore a lovely Feast Day on which to celebrate the Jubilee of this church.

Twenty five years ago Bishop John Mone, then auxiliary bishop in Glasgow, wrote to the parish: "With so many of you, I watched this building rise from its foundations, to become the beautiful 'house of God and gate to heaven' it is today. How we rejoiced on that opening day when the Lord finally had a worthy dwelling place among us". Bishop Mone went on to say "This church stands as a tribute to you and your faith. A glowing tribute to the faith, courage and perseverance to those who have gone before you marked with the sign of faith and who live on in this church: priests, parents, grandparents, all of whom played their part in building the kingdom of God in this district".

The parish priest of twenty five years ago when the Silver Jubilee was celebrated wrote "The history of the Catholic community in Knightswood is a story of generosity and of tireless dedication and labour making God's kingdom a reality". My predecessor, Cardinal Thomas Winning, in his message referred to the "renewal programme that you have undertaken" which he said would be "a great strength to you as you prepare to move into the next century". We are now nine years into this new century and all the evidence is that his words were prophetic and under the leadership of your present parish priest and those who have assisted him, you have gone from strength to strength. As today's Archbishop I compliment and thank you, and

in a very special way express my thanks to Monsignor Oweny Gallagher, who has reached his own Golden Jubilee of priesthood.

I was fascinated to read the history of Knightswood and to know that in medieval times there was an association with the Knights Templar. At the dissolution of that knightly order, much of their property and their mission were transferred to the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, more familiarly known to us as the Knights of Malta, of which Association in Britain I am presently the Principal Chaplain. I mention this simply to note a connection therefore of the parish with an ancient military and hospitalier Order that continues today its support of the Faith and the care of the sick.

Just as it was the increasing opportunities arising out of the Industrial Revolution that brought many Catholics to this area, not least from across the Irish Sea, the first Catholics in the post-Reformation period to be living here in Knightswood came as a result of the mines which dotted the area.

However, the area did not really become a township until the twenties and it was in 1924 that the Archdiocese of Glasgow secured a site of three and a half acres of land to build a church and presbytery. This site was previously known as Lyle's Farm. I gather that the present presbytery is built on the site of the old farmhouse whereas the old church, now the refurbished hall, is on the spot where the farm barns and offices once stood. It is nice to note that the present church is built on what was known as the orchard. Spiritual fruitfulness justifies its position!

But I don't forget that this church is dedicated to Saint Ninian. It was in 1927 that my predecessor, Archbishop Donald McIntosh, announced the establishment of the present parish dedicated to Saint Ninian, the first mentioned bringer of the Gospel to Scotland in the days when this part of the world was still within the Roman Empire, and known as Britannia. The Antonine Wall which marked the northern boundaries of that vast empire runs very close to where we now stand. We are therefore both within the territory and most certainly within the faith of Saint Ninian.

The foundation of the parish and the building of the first church was entrusted to Father Patrick Reilly, who arrived in October 1927 and immediately set about the task of building up both community and church. Thus as we remember and honour the first to bring the Catholic faith to us, we remember and honour the first parish priest and associate with him all those who have subsequently served the parish.

The history of the parish recalls that such were the humble circumstances of the first building that at Christmas Midnight Mass eighty years ago the parish priest, Father Reilly, caught a chill which developed into a serious illness as a result of which he was indisposed for several months. It is clear that circumstances and conditions have changed greatly since those days and this

parish is one of the richest in the Diocese in terms of its giving, from which the Archdiocese has so greatly benefitted.

The present church is credited to the ambition and commitment of Canon Thomas Rourke, who obtained from my predecessor Donald Campbell permission to build the new church, the one whose Golden Jubilee we now happily celebrate. Its solemn opening occurred on what is described as a "cold and frosty morning" of December 6<sup>th</sup> 1959, though happily there is no report of the parish priest this time suffering a chill. This was just one year after the election of Pope John XXIII, whose election I remember well since I was a priest of a couple of days old when I stood in Saint Peter's Square with thousands of others to hear that the Patriarch of Venice had been elected to the throne of Peter. I remember a woman next to me asking who it was and when I told her that it was the Patriarch of Venice she remarked, in Italian of course, that *he is very old*. Old or not, it was he who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave birth to the II Vatican Council, from which such energies have been released into the Church. And though there may be some today who, because of their displeasure at certain changes, or recognising the diminished number of people attached to the Church, point the finger at the II Vatican Council as the cause of it all, I am utterly convinced that without that Council the Church that we love would not have achieved so much in the intervening years, nor been so soundly set to face the storms of these times. We recall Christ's promise to Peter that on the rock of his profession of faith, and on him who professed it, he would build his Church, which the gates of hell would not prevail against.

The history of the parish evidences the way in which priests and people have responded, both to the challenges of the time and the opportunities unleashed by II Vatican Council. That history is an edifying account of devotion, of spiritual renewal, and of outreach.

I cannot move from the pages of history without mentioning again Bishop John Mone who came to this parish as a freshly-ordained priest and whose subsequent appointment of Bishop is described in the annals of the parish as "the jewel in the Crown of our parish, which has produced a steady stream of vocations to the priesthood and religious life".

I cannot refrain from asking you to continue to produce a stream of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, since we need so greatly servants of the Gospel and ministers of the sacraments in these our days.

I would also like to mention Father John McKelvie because in that same year this good priest died suddenly at the age of 41. I had been associated with him when I was a young bishop and was President of the Liturgy Commission, of which he was Secretary. May he, and all those like him who have departed this life laden with merit, enjoy eternal rest.

I now want to return to the feast in the concluding part of this homily. I find in the readings of today the most beautiful and pertinent passage in which to reflect with you. It is taken from Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians and comes immediately after his initial address, which is "To the saints who are faithful to Christ Jesus". He blesses God "the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ" and this not because of any merit on our parts, but "for his own kind purposes, to make us praise the glory of his grace. His free gift to us in the beloved".

His choice of us he says is made, "before the world was made" and it was so that we would be "holy and spotless and live through love in his presence". This was out of his determination "that we should become his adopted sons through Jesus Christ".

We have all had experience of this, and much of that experience has taken place in this very church, for it is here that the mystery of salvation has been announced and celebrated. Saint Paul says "he has let us know the mystery of his purpose. The hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the beginning to act upon when the times had run their course to the end". These times continue to run their course, and on a day like this when we look back we need also to look forward and do so with confidence in the future knowing that, however long the course may be, it ends securely in his love and that he will, at the end, "bring everything together under Christ as head. Everything in the heavens and everything on earth".

Saint Paul refers to those "who would put their hopes in Christ before he came" and none did so more beautifully than Mary who at the Annunciation, the story of which we heard in today's beautiful Gospel, proclaimed herself to be "the handmaid of the Lord" and was praised by her cousin Elizabeth as "blessed" for "believing that a promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled".

In my Christmas message I will point out how our Advent preparation was not simply in view of Christmas, and the memory of Our Lord's first coming, but in anticipation of His second coming, and that through our living the Gospel and in our imitating its message, we are bringing about daily the second coming. This was also Paul's theme in his letter to the Ephesians "Now you too, in him (Christ Jesus) have heard the message of the truth and the good news of your salvation, and have believed it and you too have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit with the promise, the pledge of our inheritance, which brings freedom for those whom God has taken for his own to make his glory praised". Every Christmas kindles our fervent hope that "all mankind may see the salvation of our God". May the joy of that salvation, already anticipated, be with you this Christmas and throughout the years ahead.