

Mass for Anniversary of Sacred Heart Bridgeton

Friday June 11 2010

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today is truly a “day of days” for us, as we celebrate the liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, your parish’s special feast day and the 100th anniversary of the opening of this beautiful church.

Our celebration tonight is framed by a series of dates, each a century apart ...

It was in the 1670s that the devout young French nun Margaret Mary Alacoque experienced the visions of Christ displaying his love-filled heart, urging humanity to rekindle its love of God, visions which were to inspire the modern devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus after which your parish is named.

A century later the then “village” of Bridgeton was established in the 1770s and it soon attracted a number of newly developing industries. Drawn by the prospects of employment in the factories, the village became host to an influx of Catholic Highlanders - victims of the Clearances.

That group, mostly Macdonnells from Glengarry, was the first significant number of Catholics to take up residence in the Glasgow vicinity since the Reformation. Tied by language and social customs, the Macdonnells formed an enclave in Bridgeton which was to take and retain the nickname of "Glengarry" long after the Highlanders had moved on or been assimilated.

Another century later in the 1870s your parish was founded. Until then this area formed part of the Parish of St. Mary's in Abercromby Street, but in 1873 the Sacred Heart Mission to the district was established under Father Peter Noonan and a wooden church built in what is now Old Dalmarnock Road. Later, in 1890 when the Mission became a Rectory, the presbytery by Pugin & Pugin was built adjoining the church.

This lovely church we worship in today was built in 1910 in the design of a Roman basilica by the Belgian architect, Charles J. Menart and today is one of the jewels in the architectural crown of the Archdiocese.

Of course, today is a special day too beyond the confines of this parish of the Sacred Heart, because today marks the conclusion of the Year of Priests proclaimed last year on this Feast Day by Pope Benedict XVI.

The aim of that year has been to pray for the sanctification of priests and for an outpouring of good and holy vocations.

And so as we gather here tonight we are spiritually united both geographically with the many thousands of priests of the world gathered in Rome around the Holy Father this evening.

We are united historically with the many great saints whose insights into the love of Christ enriched our understanding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and finally we are united in both senses with the pioneers of this Catholic community in Bridgeton who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

Those themes which frame our Mass tonight find rich echo in the scripture readings.

Our first reading from the Book of Ezekiel is a beautiful outpouring of God's love for humanity ... "The Lord says I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view ..."

Here is that personal love of God for humanity which St Margaret Mary proclaimed to the world through her promotion of devotion to the Sacred Heart summed up in the Word of God.

It is so easy for us to lose sight of God's deep personal love for each one of His creatures.

It is easy for us to feel anonymous in the sight of the most high.

But that is far from the truth ...

As St Paul reminds us in the second reading ... "The love of the Lord has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us ..."

It is through the gift of that Spirit that we are able to worship God, to keep His commandments and to pass on the faith we have inherited from such proud forebears.

And again in the Gospel we see further compelling evidence of God's interests in each one of us in Christ's story of the Good Shepherd, who leaves the 99 sheep to go in search of the lost one.

That figure of the Good Shepherd is a kind of role model for the priest. And today as the whole Church celebrates the end of the Year for Priests we should renew our commitment to pray for our priests and support them in their ministry. Priests too are invited to recognise the gifts of lay people and collaborate with them fully in the apostolate.

As the Holy Father wrote in his letter proclaiming the year of priests: "Priests must discover with faith, recognize with joy and foster diligently the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind. These gifts, which awaken in many people the desire for a deeper spiritual life, can benefit not only the lay faithful but the clergy as well."

I cannot conclude these reflections tonight without anticipating a little tomorrow's feast ... the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This parish today is home to many former parishioners of Our Lady of Fatima Parish which had to close in 2004.

The linkage between Our Lady's Immaculate Heart as promoted at Fatima and the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is very obvious, not least insofar as the Church places these feasts on consecutive days.

Less than a month ago our Holy Father visited Fatima, and there prayed to Our Lady for priests as the Year for Priests drew to a close.

Tonight, let me conclude by repeating those words and asking you to join with me internally in prayer ...

Our Mother for all time,
do not tire of visiting us,
consoling us, sustaining us.
Come to our aid
and deliver us from every danger
that threatens us.

With this act of entrustment and consecration,
we wish to welcome you
more deeply, more radically,
for ever and totally
into our human and priestly lives.

Let your presence cause new blooms to burst forth
in the desert of our loneliness,
let it cause the sun to shine on our darkness,
let it restore calm after the tempest,
so that all mankind shall see the salvation
of the Lord,
who has the name and the face of Jesus,
who is reflected in our hearts,
for ever united to yours!

Amen!