

Mass for the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of the Church of Christ the King

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have some very personal reasons for being delighted to be with you this afternoon as you celebrate the golden jubilee of this handsome church which has been the focal point of your spiritual lives and those of your relatives and friends over the years.

The first reason is the birth of the parish in 1934 which is also (believe it or not) my own year of birth – though I apparently did better in housing terms than the “little wooden church on the hill”!

The parish and I – and I dare say some of you – have had contemporaneous lives, having come through the second world war, knowing all about hardships and shortages, black-outs and fears. The brutal invasions of unthreatening countries, the murderous bombings of civilian targets and the subsequently revealed horrors of concentration camps were all the result of colossal pride, vengeful schemes of domination and a total disregard of the will of God for the peace of mankind.

The destructive ideologies of the 20th century were atheistic in conception and anti-Christian, and particularly anti-semitic in their unfolding.

No-one saw this coming more clearly than Pope Pius XI, who, in 1925, instituted the Feast of Christ the King with his encyclical “*Quas Primas*” to reassert the authority of the Creator over creation, and of Christ in the headship of the Church – the new creation – in and through which, as Son, He exercises his role as Universal Judge and Saviour of Mankind.

It is interesting to look back and see what Pope Pius hoped to achieve through his initiative ... and note how relevant his hopes are to today’s society. They were:

- That governments would see that the Church has the right to freedom, and should not be subjected to interference by the state (*Quas Primas*, 32)
- That peoples would come to realise the respect due to Christ (*Quas Primas*, 31).
- And that Catholics would draw inspiration from the celebration of the feast, so that Christ would become truly the centre of their lives (*Quas Primas*,33)

Origen, one of the fathers of the early Church recognised that God’s dominion is established first and foremost in the soul of mankind: “*We will come to him and make*

our home in him .. For those of us who press forward unceasingly, the Kingdom of God which is within us will reach its full completion when the apostle's words are fulfilled – that Christ, with all his enemies subject to Him, will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father so that God may be all in all. We must understand this about the Kingdom of God: just as there is no partnership between righteousness and iniquity, no fellowship of light with darkness, no accord of Christ with Belial, so the Kingdom of sin cannot co-exist with the Kingdom of God.”

This is the message of the Breviary reading of this feast, while the preface of the Mass speaks of a *“kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.”*

The epistle of the Mass carries St Paul's injunction that we “give thanks to the Father who has made it possible for us to join the saints and with them inherit the light,” while in the Gospel we hear those lovely words of Jesus as he confers the rewards of heaven on the converted and repentant thief: “Today, I promise you, you will be with me in Paradise.”

Each of us is tasked in our own way – or rather in the way chosen by God for us if we but recognise it – to contribute to the building up of Christ's Kingdom.

The Holy Father at Bellahouston addressed a specific word to the laity – to you:

Here is what he said: “There are some who now seek to exclude religious belief from public discourse, to privatize it or even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty. Yet religion is in fact a guarantee of authentic liberty and respect, leading us to look upon every person as a brother or sister. For this reason I appeal in particular to you, the lay faithful, in accordance with your baptismal calling and mission, not only to be examples of faith in public, but also to put the case for the promotion of faith's wisdom and vision in the public forum.”

We are tasked with this noble and self-denying work for we are, as citizens of God's kingdom, servants of our King.

This applies to you and to me – to me who as a priest was ordained 52 years ago on the Feast of Christ the King – and to you whose Church was dedicated to Him 50 years ago.

My predecessor Archbishop Mackintosh, when he decided to establish a parish under the title of Christ the King, must surely have been acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For the new parish was, if truth be told, rather empty – just over 1000 people lived in its boundaries, spread across acres of open farmland. Indeed an early brochure tells us that “there was barely a house between Aikenhead Road and the village of Carmunnock.”

I believe he was also inspired by his knowledge of, and friendship with Pope Pius XI, for Archbishop Mackintosh came largely as a stranger to Glasgow, having spent his previous years as Rector of the Pontifical Scots College in Rome.

How times have changed!

Now this parish, with 5000 souls, is one of the largest and busiest in the Archdiocese. Its fruits include a healthy crop of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, including one bishop - the late Bishop Stephen McGill of Paisley, whom we recall in a special way today, since it was he who celebrated the Pontifical High Mass at 12 noon on Sunday October 2, 1960 to mark the solemn opening of this building.

I recall in a particular way too another ordination – that of Dr Frank Wilson – the first priest I had the privilege of ordaining in the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

While remembering them, we recall also those, whether clerical or lay, who over the years have contributed to the building of this parish and its schools. We pray with those who have already entered through this church into paradise, and thank all, including your present parish priest and curate, both sharing the same name though spelled differently (Gallagher and Gallacher) for the witness of their service.

I want to end with another message from Pope Benedict whom I had the privilege of seeing once again last week in Rome when he commended the work of Christian unity in the golden jubilee year of the foundation by Pope John XXIII of the Secretariat, now the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

In an Apostolic Exhortation published last week, recalling and concluding the recent synod of bishops which focused on the scriptures in the life of the Church, Pope Benedict stressed the importance of Holy Scripture which already unites us to our Christian neighbours. He said: “I express my heartfelt hope for the flowering of a new season of greater love for Sacred Scripture on the part of every member of the People of God, so that their prayerful and faith-filled reading of the Bible will, with time, deepen their personal relationship with Jesus.”

“The Church’s greatest priority,” he said, is “to enable the people of our time once more to encounter God, the God who speaks to us and shares his love so that we might have life in abundance.”

This is a timely message for you and provides a programme for the years that lie ahead as you commence the next 50 years of your lives as the community and church of Christ the King!