

## Mass for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Parish of St Bernard's, Nitshill

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ

The Lord's day is always a reason for the Christian to celebrate ... indeed the saints have called every Sunday a "little Easter". But today, in this community of St Bernard's there is a very special reason to rejoice ... and that is in marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of your parish.

It was my predecessor, Archbishop Campbell who laid the foundation stone of this fine Church of yours on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1963. But your story begins before that date ... three years before to be exact, when the same Archbishop Campbell founded the parish on September 16 1960.

It is a clear sign of the faith of your founding fathers that only a month passed between the Archbishop signing the decree bringing the parish into being and the first Mass being celebrated in what was then known as Montford House, Barrhead.

Living, as you do, on the edge of the Archdiocese and on the border with the Diocese of Paisley, the early annals of the parish speak of the ready co-operation which existed during those foundational years between the first parish priest, Fr Gerard Dunn, and his colleague at St John's Barrhead, Father Teehan and the then-bishop of Paisley, Bishop Black, who provided all the facilities necessary to offer worship to God in the year of the building of this church.

Of course your neighbour on the other flank – the Parish of St Robert's was another great ally in the early days, with dances and meetings being held in St Robert's Hall for the newly established St Bernard's Parish.

And so today, there is a real sense of coming back to our roots as we reflect on the fact that once more St Bernard's and St Robert's share so much, not least the priestly services of Fr Neil, Canon Coakley and Fr Thomas.

That story of gathering together a new community to praise God and serve his people is reflected in the first reading of today's Mass from the Prophet Isaiah.

"The Lord says this: I am coming to gather the nations of every language. They shall come to witness my glory. I will give them a sign and send some of their survivors to the nations: to Tarshish, Put, Lud, Moshech, Rosh, Tubal, and Javan, to the distant islands that have never heard of me or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory to the nations."

Over the last 50 years the people of St Bernard's have indeed "proclaimed his glory to the nations" and it is my hope that that same work of proclamation will continue for many years to come.

Our second reading today provides an equally appropriate commentary on the various ups and downs of Parish life which have marked the last half century here in Nitshill.

It is no secret to you that St Bernard's was considered for closure a few years ago due to the declining population, the demolition of so many houses in the parish and the shortage of available priests.

That trial is not an easy one for any parish to bear. But the words of the Letter to the Hebrews speak of hope in adversity ... a hope that you as a parish have displayed in recent years ...

“So hold up your limp arms and steady your trembling knees and smooth out the path you tread; then the injured limb will not be wrenched, it will grow strong again.”

*“It will grow strong again ...”*

Those are wonderful words and words we should take to heart as we look to the future. For today is not only about remembering the great predecessors of ours who built this parish, it is also about committing ourselves to its future.

Our Lord’s words in the Gospel can seem harsh, but they are meant to encourage us to keep going, to avoid discouragement, to look forward to the great prize of eternal life which has been promised to us:

“And men from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Yes, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.”

In today’s society it is easy for the Christian to be discouraged, to feel that he or she is being left behind, or is somehow “behind the times.” But nothing could be further from the truth.

In less than a month’s time we will hear that assurance from none other than Pope Benedict XVI who will say Mass just a few short miles from where we gather today.

His pontificate has been marked by the constant call to hope. Indeed one of his encyclical letters is entitled *Spe Salvi*, “In hope we are saved”.

He notes how Jesus brought to mankind, "an encounter with the Lord of all lords, an encounter with the living God and thus an encounter with a hope stronger than the sufferings of slavery, a hope which transformed life and the world from within".

That message of hope is one that I want you to take home with you today and to spread among your relatives and friends.

Your heavenly patron, St Bernard was filled with hope in all his works and his most famous composition, the Memorare, is a poem to Our Lady bathed in the shadow of hope. He addresses her with such confidence ...

“Never was it known, that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought this intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence I fly to thee, O virgin of virgins, my Mother”

The Holy Father made that link between the virtue of hope and the figure of Our Lady in concluding his encyclical.

He wrote: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!"

Let that devotion to the Mother of God be our sure guide in the years to come.

Amen