

PRESS RELEASE
15 June 2010

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor marks the end of the Year for Priests with an address to Irish priests in Maynooth

The Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor was the guest speaker at the Maynooth Union Celebrations on Tuesday 15 June 2010. The address was written and the invitation extended prior to his appointment by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI as the apostolic visitor for the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Press release and full text of address ...

In his address, the Cardinal spoke about:

His own Irish roots:

“I had an uncle a priest who worked in the Portsmouth Diocese and whenever we had family gatherings he would make a speech beginning with a quote from one of the Psalms, Remember the rock from which you were hewn How could I forget my Irish roots when the culture I lived in England still had deep resonances of the background of my father and mother. How grateful I am for all that they gave me, nourished and strengthened in this land of saints and sinners.”

The impact of the Celtic Tiger:

“We have all lived through the new story of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ and a nation which was fast throwing over its religious identity as well, to embrace a much more relaxed and easy secularism. There was a sense that it needed to break with the old stories and the way they intertwined faith and identity in order to live the new modern life that was on offer. The nation had a new confidence which came with its well educated and talented younger generations. But these last two years have shown us how fragile new stories can be – as fragile and as unstable as the economic movements upon which they have been built. Even so, it is surely a tribute to the deeper sense of community that the nation can face the inevitable consequences of a severe recession without social division and disruption.”

The scandal of abuse:

“Clearly those who have suffered abuse are foremost in our thoughts and prayers. Today I wanted to reflect on how these terrible crimes have affected the Church. It does not matter that the great majority of priests and bishops are good servants and pastors of their people. When the scandal of abuse runs so deep, it casts its shadow over everything.”

Being a wounded healer:

“You know, the things I remember about my life as a priest are not the successes but rather the failures and one particular and painful failure occurred ten years ago when, owing to my grave mishandling of a priest who was an abuser, I was attacked and vilified for nearly two years. You probably know the story.”

“But I also began to understand in a new way, by talking with victims, the pain and grave damage done to them. I say this to show, I suppose, that I myself am not free from blame but have had to learn from mistakes to become, as someone described it, a wounded healer. From that experience I learnt yet again to pray for perseverance, obedience to my vocation, and of suffering in a way which I did not expect and which, in the end, brought some positive benefit because of the national safeguarding policies, procedures and structures which are now in place and used in all our parishes and dioceses in England and Wales.”

The Road to Emmaus:

“As I lived, worked and prayed through these things I came to see my experience in terms of a very difficult and unclear journey that I was asked to make. I thought of it in terms of the Road to Emmaus. It too comes out of an experience when the story is broken and hope appears lost. I think it is a journey and a road that speaks to us all.”

The ‘dark night’ of the Church in Ireland:

“Some have spoken of this time as the ‘dark night’ of the Church in Ireland. Yet, painful though the dark night is, we know it is also a time of learning; a time of purifying and of trusting. In the dark night, all we have is our faith that God has not abandoned us, is working with us, and, of course, we feel the rawness not only of our sin but also our poverty. In some way, though, that poverty is also a gift because it strips away all the other structures that we have come to rely upon. It brings us back to source of our life, our identity and our call.”

The way forward:

No magic formula:

“I have no magic formula for this. Indeed, there is a danger in rushing to find a solution before we have fully understood the shape of the problem. Of course, there are some things that can and must be done and are already in hand. As in England and Wales, we need honest appraisal of where our structures and procedures failed, not just legally and canonically but humanly. Then we need to waste no time to get new and more effective ones in place.”

A need for conversion of heart, newness of attitudes and unstinted love

Pope Benedict XVI’s letter to the Church in Ireland:

“Throughout this crisis there has been a close examination of leadership and the ways in which it seems to have failed. When writing to the Church in Ireland, the Pope acknowledged this and began to map out a path of repentance and renewal. For many, the letter did not go far enough and I know that in a climate of desolation, where so many feel that justice still needs to be accomplished, this is understandable. Yet, I think it would be a great loss to dismiss it or think that it has nothing to say at the present moment. It is a letter which begins to show us the way of speaking the truth in love. It understands that renewing structures alone, for all their necessity, will not heal the grieving soul and wounded spirit. That is why the Pope also sets another process in motion. It goes deep into the great spiritual patrimony of the Irish Church. It is about a

genuine and deep repentance which requires not only a commitment to truth and understanding, especially understanding the roots and consequences of what has happened, but a commitment also to love.”

Not hurrying:

“Understandable as it is, one of our greatest temptations in situations of desolation is to try to hurry through it. But we must have the courage and faith not to rush; to give it the time it needs; time to hear all that we need to hear, and to say all that needs to be said from the depths of our hearts. It takes a different sort of leadership to persevere in the desert times and to remain faithful to the truth that needs not only to be spoken, but also heard and understood. If we can allow this time then I think there opens up opportunities for renewing leadership and discovering what it means in a fresh, perhaps, liberated way. Perhaps Ireland will develop a new relationship with the Church in this post-modern age.”

The Mass - the source of unity, strength and hope:

“Our unity and our strength and our hope is the Mass, the people gathered round the altar where the Eucharist is celebrated and we are in communion with Jesus Christ and offer our sacrifice to the Father in and through and with Him and then receive Him. Our unity is, quite simply, Jesus Christ, and our belief and our hope and our love of Him.”

Communion with our people:

“This can only happen when trust is given and restored where it has been lost. But that restoration comes when relations are built to those actions of which the Prophet Micah speaks: This is what God wants of you, only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God. So it is when we speak authentically, simply, honestly from our own love of Christ and of His Church and not from any second-hand formulas or headline- grabbing sound-bites. When trust in the institution is weakened, we can only turn to the person and begin to rebuild from there.”

Real participative leadership:

“It is one of the principal ministries of the bishop, together with his priests, to seek, to nourish and to foster the self-understanding and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. This must go beyond the routine and necessary chores. They must embrace responsibilities which allow for a real participative leadership.

“This means, I think, more open and consultative processes at every level of the Church’s life. If there is a fear of losing control or power, it is a false one.”

Not being afraid:

“We should not fear. In our prayer, our worship, our contemplation before God, and following the teaching of the Church, for those who believe in Christ, the future is always full of hope and open to new life. Nor should we forget the words of Mother Teresa: God has not called me to be successful – he has called me to be faithful.”

Hopes and prayers:

“So my hope and my prayer this afternoon is that you continue to create a culture in which God is honoured and worshipped and all men and women cherished, valued and supported from the beginning of their lives to their end when they enter into the fullness of the Mystery of God. God matters to everyone and it is because of this we must worship and serve Him.”

ENDS

Full address:

**ADDRESS TO IRISH PRIESTS IN MAYNOOTH
15th June 2010**

I am delighted to be with you this afternoon and I am very pleased so many of you are here. Perhaps before I begin I should say that this address was just about completed before my appointment by Pope Benedict as one of those involved in the Visitation here in Ireland.

When we come together on these anniversary occasions we have plenty of stories to tell. Being Irish it would be strange if we didn't. Stories are important. They carry our history, our experience, our humour and our pain. When we tell them, we again put shape on a life and a history. Sometimes, they carry a memory of which we can't let go. Often, they carry a moment, a person, an experience that still nourishes us. In sharing our stories we share ourselves and express not only our past but also our future hopes.

As well as our personal stories, there are also the grand ones; those that have shaped the identity of the nation and of the Church. How many times has the story of Ireland been told - its sorrow and its triumphs? To how many foreign lands has that story been carried by generations? Perhaps the unique feature of these stories was the way in which faith and Irish identity were so intertwined. This would be true of myself. I had an uncle a priest who worked in the Portsmouth Diocese and whenever we had family gatherings he would make a speech beginning with a quote from one of the Psalms, *Remember the rock from which you were hewn* How could I forget my Irish roots when the culture I lived in in England still had deep resonances of the background of my father and mother. How grateful I am for all that they gave me, nourished and strengthened in this land of saints and sinners.

Returning from Vatican Two, the formidable Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid is reported to have informed his diocese, “Allow me to reassure you, no change will worry the tranquillity of your Christian lives.” Quoted by James S. Donnelly Jr. in *Christianity in Ireland, Revisiting the Story*, (2002) ed. Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh, The Columba Press, p. 272. His Grace clearly felt that the story was not going to change. In many ways his confidence comes out of what is sometimes called, ‘The Cullen Church.’ But for all Archbishop McQuaid's confidence the story has changed, deeply and decisively for both the Church and the country.

There was the great story of the New Ireland, leaving the poverty of its largely rural past behind and entering the new urban life with all its energies and opportunity. The New Ireland which economically, culturally and psychologically emerged from its own history, so closely tied to its struggle with England, to become a modern European State. We have all lived through the new story of the 'Celtic Tiger' and a nation which was fast throwing over its religious identity as well, to embrace a much more relaxed and easy secularism. There was a sense that it needed to break with the old stories and the way they intertwined faith and identity in order to live the new modern life that was on offer. The nation had a new confidence which came with its well educated and talented younger generations. But these last two years have shown us how fragile new stories can be – as fragile and as unstable as the economic movements upon which they have been built. Even so, it is surely a tribute to the deeper sense of community that the nation can face the inevitable consequences of a severe recession without social division and disruption. But it must, in some way, leave a quiet sense of mistrust, if not betrayal, in the grander stories that society feels compelled to tell itself. That is at one level. Then there is the other great story that touches us most personally and deeply especially as we look back over all the years of our priesthood. These are part of us; the stories we were given and the ones that we have made as well.

Theology is, perhaps, a particular way of telling a story. Through all its abstract categories we can see the structural lines of the narrative. The great narrative of the Church, its self-understanding and pilgrimage; its confidence in the sacraments and that the revelation it has received of Jesus Christ is of fundamental significance for the world. Within that, too, is the story of our own priesthood; the archetypal story of the *alter Christus*, the Shepherd, the father, teacher, consoler, sanctifier and sometimes prophetic judge. Whatever shape is given to that theology it is filled out in a life; it has a human face and a human history. It is, of course, our faces and our histories; it is our stories. Until relatively recent times, the theology and the actual life of the Church to which it gave shape was inseparable from the story of Ireland. The priest, too was part of this; inseparable from the life of the people and the rhythms of their lives. We know that there was an idealism and a romanticism in all this. In the light of all that has happened over these years we may be more suspicious of this story and more zealous in deconstructing it, but we should not forget that there was a truth in it as well. At some level it carried a sense of Ireland's call to holiness, its mission. It was a witness to a confident Catholicism which could stand before the world. It was a theology lived and given real flesh and blood in the simple, sincere and unpretentious lives of so many priests, religious and people and the faith they took with them to every part of the world. We have all lived this story in some way and we have all been formed by it.

Now, this story too would seem to be a broken narrative. Again, we are faced not only with a sense of loss, but of mistrust and betrayal. Clearly those who have suffered abuse are foremost in our thoughts and prayers. Today I wanted to reflect on how these terrible crimes have affected the Church. It does not matter that the great majority of priests and bishops are good servants and pastors of their people. When the scandal of abuse runs so deep, it casts its shadow over everything. It is not just the public dimension to it all. Painful though it is, that can and must be faced. It is, rather, the more personal side of it.

It is the way in which we can all feel that our own ministry is somehow contaminated. There can be a sense of suddenly being exposed and naked, all too conscious of our inadequacies, and acutely aware that maybe we have lost part of our moral and spiritual authority. Of course, this is nothing compared with the pain of abuse suffered by the victims. At other levels there may be a sense of grieving for the pain that has been caused, the faith that has been broken and the stories that can no longer be told. With that there is disorientation and anger. In these moments, we no longer know who we are and there are plenty of voices telling other darker stories about our identity and purpose. The scandal of abuse robs us all of our innocence.

So we meet here today shorn of so many familiar things. The stories which we have told to put meaning and purpose and value on our lives and work – nationally as well as religiously – seem to ring strangely hollow. It is here that I want to begin. But before I do I want to share with you some of my own experience of being in this place when I was Archbishop of Westminster.

You know, the things I remember about my life as a priest are not the successes but rather the failures and one particular and painful failure occurred ten years ago when, owing to my grave mishandling of a priest who was an abuser, I was attacked and vilified for nearly two years. You probably know the story. How well I remember the feelings of failure and isolation and shame, not so much for myself but for my family, my Diocese, for the Catholic people of England and Wales who, to a certain extent, felt the shame of my own failure and of child abuse in general. But I also began to understand in a new way, by talking with victims, the pain and grave damage done to them. I say this to show, I suppose, that I myself am not free from blame but have had to learn from mistakes to become, as someone described it, a wounded healer. From that experience I learnt yet again to pray for perseverance, obedience to my vocation, and of suffering in a way which I did not expect and which, in the end, brought some positive benefit because of the national safeguarding policies, procedures and structures which are now in place and used in all our parishes and dioceses in England and Wales.”

As I lived, worked and prayed through these things I came to see my experience in terms of a very difficult and unclear journey that I was asked to make. I thought of it in terms of the Road to Emmaus. It too comes out of an experience when the story is broken and hope appears lost. I think it is a journey and a road that speaks to us all. Let me just recall some of its principal features:

The Road to Emmaus.

The spiritual and emotional landscape of Luke’s story is one that we can easily recognise. There is the flight from the place of pain, of broken dreams and lost hope. We cannot mistake the levels of betrayal; it is not only that these two disciples feel that their own faith in the Messiah has been betrayed; maybe, too, there is also a sense in which they have colluded in abandoning him. How understandable that they should want to get as far away as possible from the scene; get back to normal, to what is familiar, whatever these things may now mean. But this, too, is part of the confusion; it is an illusion to think that

they can return to the way things were. For them, there can be no normal anymore. Even if they spend the rest of their lives in silence, just getting on with the routine things of life, that very silence will be filled with the unspoken memory of their crucified Lord. How could they ever trust the scriptures again? How could they ever trust themselves again?

Yet it is precisely on this journey – this other journey of loss and despair – that the stranger comes to walk with them. We know that it is part of Luke’s apologetics that he unfolds scripture to them. In other words, that the death of the Christ was actually part of God’s unfathomable plan, not the pragmatic casual act of some brutal imperial power. But we also know that in opening scripture to them, he is also retelling them the story that they had believed in. He is teaching them how to live again with faith; to believe and even risk their lives for the sake of the story.

Luke is also teaching something very beautiful about the way the Risen Christ deals with us. He does not force himself upon us but with a simple, astonishing humility, he meets us *‘in via’* – on our way not his way; where we are, not where we think we should be. In this meeting of the disciples with the Risen Lord whom they do not recognise we discover one of those Lucan masterstrokes. The Lord invites them first to tell their story, from their point of view. *“They stopped, their faces downcast...Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free”* (Lk. 24).

They give him the facts; they put before him their despair and broken dreams. They share with him their confusion and emptiness, *“Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported but of him they saw nothing.”*

Here we have their story, but the Risen Lord teaches from within this experience of loss and brokenness how to find the Gospel of Life. He needed to show them how, within this road, is another road, the road that the Risen Lord is now walking. It is not a road of denial. It does not lead to false enchantments but it is a real road of suffering and confusion. It is the road that God has carved out of all our failures and mistakes; the road that he walks with us showing us that this road does not lead to emptiness but it is the road that leads us to Him. This ‘catechesis’ of the Risen Christ was the necessary preparation that allowed them finally to recognise Him; to understand that even when He disappeared from sight, they would always recognise Him in ‘the breaking of the bread.’ And their hearts were alive again. With these new hearts they return. *‘Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us* (Lk. 24).

My sense is that we are on that same road as those disciples. Though the recent revelations about child abuse and the failure at so many levels of the Church’s leadership can make it difficult, I believe we can have confidence in the road that we are walking. I want to assure you, there is the joy of resurrection after suffering and death. There is joy in our faith. Jesus talks to you and to me as He talked to the disciples on the road. He calls us and sends us out again in His name.

Personal Experience:

The way may be long, but we can learn from this moment of broken stories and through them we can begin again to find a new understanding. What is clear is that we cannot go back, nor can we simply repeat the formulas of the past. Some have spoken of this time as the 'dark night' of the Church in Ireland. Yet, painful though the dark night is, we know it is also a time of learning; a time of purifying and of trusting. In the dark night, all we have is our faith that God has not abandoned us, is working with us, and, of course, we feel the rawness not only of our sin but also our poverty. In some way, though, that poverty is also a gift because it strips away all the other structures that we have come to rely upon. It brings us back to source of our life, our identity and our call.

Let me now say something very personal. Jesus promised us that he would not leave us orphans, without a hearth or a home. For me the Church has always been my home, my mother, my teacher. I am aware, as we all are, of the narrow-mindedness and immaturity and other things that irritate one about the Church, but it is the hearth of my soul and the mother of my spiritual being. I cannot find words to thank the Church for having made me live with a sense of order and beauty. It gives me the Word of God in Scripture and the Presence of God in Christ in the sacraments and, above all, the presence of the Holy Spirit in His people with the ability, as it were, to live with the saints. The Church puts order into my life and my mind and is always recalling me to the mission contained in the Gospel. I suppose, above all, the Church gives me the Holy Eucharist, with all the People of God gathered around the altar being united and in communion and being nourished by the Son of God.

This is the story that is never broken because, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we discover that it is not our story but the one we have been given. It is His story and He tells it again in the lives of the good, ordinary priests that we know and have known; in the daily goodness and holiness of the women and men who give us the daily example of faithfulness. This, too, is the mark of priesthood and the character of our ministry in the joyous confident times and in the dark nights where we keep vigil for the dawn.

Looking Forward: Beginning to tell the Story again.

And so we have come here to celebrate our anniversaries. You have my warmest congratulations. But rather than just gather to tell the old familiar tales, I suppose we have come to discover we have to begin again. Yes, we have to carry on but we also have to find the truth which we can speak and live in love that will not only bring a new heart to the Nation but to the Church. I have no magic formula for this. Indeed, there is a danger in rushing to find a solution before we have fully understood the shape of the problem. Of course, there are some things that can and must be done and are already in hand. As in England and Wales, we need honest appraisal of where our structures and procedures failed, not just legally and canonically but humanly. Then we need to waste no time to get new and more effective ones in place. That is a beginning but I think there is, too, a deeper and slower process in which we all have a part. I used to be deeply involved in the ecumenical movement and I remember being profoundly moved when I read these words from the Second Vatican Council's document on Ecumenism: *There is no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion, newness of attitudes and unstinted love.* (U.R. No. 7). So I believe that the process that has to happen here in

Ireland can be summed up in those three phrases: conversion of heart, newness of attitudes and unstinted love.

First of all, there is 'conversion of heart'. Throughout this crisis there has been a close examination of leadership and the ways in which it seems to have failed. When writing to the Church in Ireland, the Pope acknowledged this and began to map out a path of repentance and renewal. For many, the letter did not go far enough and I know that in a climate of desolation, where so many feel that justice still needs to be accomplished, this is understandable. Yet, I think it would be a great loss to dismiss it or think that it has nothing to say at the present moment. It is a letter which begins to show us the way of speaking the truth in love. It understands that renewing structures alone, for all their necessity, will not heal the grieving soul and wounded spirit. That is why the Pope also sets another process in motion. It goes deep into the great spiritual patrimony of the Irish Church. It is about a genuine and deep repentance which requires not only a commitment to truth and understanding, especially understanding the roots and consequences of what has happened, but a commitment also to love.

Now is the time for us to live what we have so often taught and preached. Repentance is about change; a seeking of the grace we need because without it, no change can go deep enough to really transform us. That time of repentance is a time of grieving which is more than just apology. To use the biblical word, it is a time for lament, a really honest acknowledgement of what has been done and what has been lost. Yet, such an act of truth is also an act of courage and hope. It turns us again to the source of our life and faith; it opens us to God. It is our cry that He would 'rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.' 'Create for us a pure heart' and put a new spirit within us and it is about taking the time to let that desire go deep. When we can say 'yes' to this sort of change then not only our words but our will and our understanding are changed too. Then we shall find new possibilities in our relationship to God and to each other.

I do not for a moment think this is easy, but I do think that there is such a deep spiritual resource in the Church in Ireland that it can be done. But it takes time. Understandable as it is, one of our greatest temptations in situations of desolation is to try to hurry through it. But we must have the courage and faith not to rush; to give it the time it needs; time to hear all that we need to hear, and to say all that needs to be said from the depths of our hearts. It takes a different sort of leadership to persevere in the desert times and to remain faithful to the truth that needs not only to be spoken, but also heard and understood. If we can allow this time then I think there opens up opportunities for renewing leadership and discovering what it means in a fresh, perhaps, liberated way. Perhaps Ireland will develop a new relationship with the Church in this post-modern age.

Second, I speak of 'newness of attitudes'. What is needed is something at a deeper level, something that demands a change of life-style. 'Change of heart is central' but it is not just an end in itself. It must be so that God can bring something new to birth in us and through us, personally and as a community. As we walk our own road to Emmaus, could it not be that Jesus Christ is both stripping us of our defences and false stories and teaching us again how to be priests and bishops for his people? To be ordained priest is to

live with Christ as Head of His Body, the Church, not for the salvation of the priest or, indeed, of the bishop, but of others. To discover again how to live this daily gift of self is to discover how to trust in Him and in His people.

The sacrament of priesthood is not just something we receive, it is rather something we become; it is marked by the same surrender and gift of Christ's own life. Surrender to the Father is not a loss of self but its deepest expression.

For us, as priests, I believe that that surrender to the Father is lived as our obedience to the Word of God and our vocation which the Church interprets for us. It is something that we have to learn, and learning takes patience, which has been called *the little sister of hope*. Perhaps in these hard times we are learning to have that patience, that surrender and that hope. If all this is obedience to the Word of God, to the priest it also means obedience to the mind of the Church and to the Paschal Mystery. Here we touch the core of Christ's life – His continuous self-gift which is at the heart of his whole being. It is his self-gift which never ceases, even in the silence of the Cross and in the dark emptiness of death. Christ lives that self-emptying because it is the most complete act of love.

Some years ago I met the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Vlk, and during the meal we had together he told me about his experiences during the Communist era in the Czech Republic. He told me how, for ten years of his life, he was persecuted by the authorities and his licence to practise as a priest was removed. He was thrown out of his parish and told to earn his keep and make his own hidden way in the world. He became a window-cleaner in the city of Prague. One day, while high up on a ladder cleaning windows on one of Prague's beautiful streets, he saw below a group of German tourists window-shopping. He could hear them laughing, joking and chatting about what they wanted to buy. And then it struck him. A voice deep within him: "Nobody knows who you are Nobody cares that you are a priest, nobody cares that you have faith, nobody is interested in the message of Jesus that you preach". He shared with me his sense of abandonment and isolation. Then he said, very beautifully and profoundly, "But suddenly, like a revelation, it became clear to me that the Cross is not a pious object out there but the Cross is a living reality in my life, for on the Cross of Jesus God is present but hidden." To be a priest is to make this self-gift the rule of our lives: it is simply to be love. Perhaps the greatest wound for every one caught up in this present crisis is the betrayal of love. But we can learn to find it again in Him through His grace. It is the Eucharistic pattern of our lives.

So maybe now is the time for a newness of attitude towards that sacrament within us, to make our priesthood again the sacrament of love, lived freely in self-gift, truth and the service of God's People. It means a celebration of the Eucharist in a way that is profound. The priest presides over the Eucharist and does not control it; he enables there to be a proper participation by all the lay people. It is the experience of Emmaus which we have been reflecting upon: to recognise him in the breaking of the bread. In that moment is also a recognition of their unity with him and with one another.

In my experience, I have to say that I think the liturgy in our countries can be greatly

improved. In some parishes there are bad readers, bad singing, bad preaching and, sad to say, priests as I have said, who control the liturgy instead of presiding over the liturgy. How crucial is that celebration every day and, above all, every week, when the people come together knowing that their unity is not fundamentally focused on the Pope or the Bishops, though obviously both have their part to play in the communion of the Church. Our unity and our strength and our hope is the Mass, the people gathered round the altar where the Eucharist is celebrated and we are in communion with Jesus Christ and offer our sacrifice to the Father in and through and with Him and then receive Him. Our unity is, quite simply, Jesus Christ, and our belief and our hope and our love of Him.

When I speak of newness of attitudes, perhaps I would also like to speak of us as priests and, indeed, as bishops, to be more in communion with our people. This can only happen when trust is given and restored where it has been lost. But that restoration comes when relations are built to those actions of which the Prophet Micah speaks: *This is what God wants of you, only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.* So it is when we speak authentically, simply, honestly from our own love of Christ and of His Church and not from any second-hand formulas or headline-grabbing sound-bites. When trust in the institution is weakened, we can only turn to the person and begin to rebuild from there. But let me encourage you. I once had a questionnaire in my former diocese of Arundel and Brighton and, among other things, asked the people what were the good things about their parish and what were the things that could be improved. I was quite delighted when about eighty per cent of the eight thousand responses said the best thing about their parish was their parish priest. I am quite certain that the same is true here in Ireland. The people have a respect and a real affection and love for their priest, not only in the past, but to-day.

I think being in communion with our people has practical consequences. One of the real works of leadership is to bring forth and confirm the gifts of others in the community. As you will know from your own experience, a parish has a profoundly rich resource of talents in all its members. Since the Council, the Church has developed and deepened its theology of the laity. It is one of the principal ministries of the bishop, together with his priests, to seek, to nourish and to foster the self-understanding and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. This must go beyond the routine and necessary chores. They must embrace responsibilities which allow for a real participative leadership. There is real wisdom and expertise, both secular and spiritual, among our people and we must not be afraid to let their abundant gifts serve the good of the Church. They are, after all, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I know it is a challenge to get a huge response from some of your people. But there has to be good communication with the people whom you serve. The structures of the parish must express that oneness and cooperation in which all can come to a common mind. This means, I think, more open and consultative processes at every level of the Church's life. If there is a fear of losing control or power, it is a false one. So, I repeat, what is hoped for is conversion of heart, newness of attitudes and unstinted love.

In Orthodox monasteries, there is a lovely custom that at the end of the day, following Night Prayer, the Abbot sits in his chair and one by one the monks approach him and

kneel before him. The Abbot then kisses each monk on the top of his head as a sign of forgiveness, acceptance and love. That is for me a symbol of what the people of this country and, indeed, the people of Europe, are looking for. I believe in the God revealed to us by Jesus, who is a God who forgives us, accepts us and loves us. He is the God who speaks to us about who we are, how we should live and teaches us the ways that will lead us into a responsible exercise of our freedom. If we close our hearts and minds to Him, if we forget or exclude God, then our lives lose both meaning and hope. Pope Benedict expresses this beautifully in his encyclical on Christian hope when he says, *We need greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day, but these are not enough without the great hope which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we by ourselves cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope, not any God but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in all its entirety (Spe Salvi 31)*

The challenge confronting the Church today is, as always, how best to communicate the richness and newness of the Gospel message to the people of our countries. The centrality of that message is of a God whose love for us is unlimited. We learn about this love in our families, our relationships, above all in the communion of the believing women and men who are the Church. So we should not fear. In our prayer, our worship, our contemplation before God, and following the teaching of the Church, for those who believe in Christ, the future is always full of hope and open to new life. Nor should we forget the words of Mother Teresa: *God has not called me to be successful – he has called me to be faithful.*

The literary scholar Daniel Corkery used the term the ‘hidden Ireland’ to refer to the popular culture of the Catholic, Irish speaking, under-class of the eighteenth century. I think there is also another ‘hidden Ireland’ in our own time. The media exposure of these last years, and the broken narratives that we can no longer return to, can easily lead us to miss this other quieter Ireland in our midst. Yet we find it there in the holiness of so many women and men. They carry the story for us – one that is old yet forever new. In their faithfulness we can see God’s faithfulness to us and we can learn from them how to be their servants, how to be their priests. So my hope and my prayer this afternoon is that you continue to create a culture in which God is honoured and worshipped and all men and women cherished, valued and supported from the beginning of their lives to their end when they enter into the fullness of the Mystery of God. God matters to everyone and it is because of this we must worship and serve Him.

Let me end with these words of St. Paul to the Ephesians: *Glory to Him whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to Him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.* (5,604 words)