

Chrism Mass

“Although I have lived through much darkness, I have seen enough evidence to be unshakably convinced that no difficulty, no fear is so great that it can completely suffocate the hope that springs eternal in our hearts. Do not let that hope die! Stake your lives on it!”

These are words spoken by the late Pope John Paul II to the young people attending the *World Youth Day* event in Toronto in 2002. I recall them tonight, because over these past few months we have witnessed the exposure of much *darkness* in the life of the Catholic Church in Ireland. In telling their painful story, survivors of clerical child abuse have shown great courage and bravery. It is a story that wasn't heard by those in authority in the past, but now with the publication of the *Ryan* and *Murphy* reports their voice and experience is, at last, being heard and listened to. In the words of Pope Benedict in his recent Pastoral Letter, words in which I add my own humble and heartfelt support, *“You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry”* (#6).

But words are not enough! The only way we will truly show our sorrow and try to bring about peace in the lives of those who have been hurt so deeply is the way we reflect upon and put into action the highest standards around child protection in our parishes so that, in the words of Pope Benedict we, *“ensure the protection of children from such crimes in the future.”* (#2) With this in mind, I am pleased

to welcome here this evening the *Parish Designated Persons* from throughout the diocese who have completed the “*Safeguarding Children*” training programme. You have shown great generosity and leadership in responding to this very important role of ensuring the implementation of the “*Safeguarding Children - Policy and Procedures*” (*Published August, 2009*) in the parishes of our diocese. I thank you most sincerely for your support. I remind everyone, not just the Designated Leaders, that we cannot become indifferent around this important role of safeguarding children and presume that once there is a policy in place everything is satisfactory. We must ensure that this policy, as Pope Benedict reminds us is, “*continually revised and updated*” (#11). May we work together as people and priests in this task so as to ensure the safety of all children in our care.

Through the experience of the past few months, many faith filled people of have become disillusioned with the Church. Down through the years so many people have committed themselves to and have supported their local parish. Some are active in various forms of ministry, others quietly attend their local church every Sunday and there are many parents who have made and continue to make great efforts to pass on the faith to their children in a changed and changing culture. Many of these people, very understandably, now find themselves struggling with new questions. The answers are not simple. But perhaps there is a direction, a way forward I might suggest this evening. This way forward is to turn more deeply to the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel always offers new possibility, even in the darkest of times.

We are about to embark upon the dramatic journey of the Triduum, where we will enter into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. His story is our story. Baroness Nuala O'Loan reminded us last week at our diocesan gatherings that each one of us as Christians are called to a life of holiness. We tend to shy away from this, but in its essence it invites us into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If this is the case then we too have to experience the cross before experiencing resurrection. This is not merely about the end of life, but is at the heart of our daily lives as disciples' of Christ. Yes many are finding the present experience we are going through a *Good Friday* experience. It reminds us that we are part of the broken body of Christ. And yet in the midst of brokenness, as we see in the Gospels, we find Christ, this is the great mystery of our faith. In the midst of brokenness the seeds of hope exist!

Throughout my ministry here in the diocese I have been inspired and moved by the commitment of so many people. People continue to commit themselves to the ministries of music, reading, Eucharistic ministry, safeguarding children, bereavement ministry. People give of their time to serve the needs of young people at local parish level and diocesan level such as the initial preparation that is starting for the next *World Youth Day* experience in Madrid in 2011. So many

young people themselves put in such an effort to serving the needs of others in parish and in their schools such as the Meitheal leadership groups. The major effort put in by so many parents and parish leaders in the pre sacramental programmes offered to First Communion and Confirmation candidates. There are the liturgy committees, Justice and Peace groups, the Parish Pastoral Councils, people involved in prayer ministry and charity work and there are all those generous people who quietly lend their support to those who experience the loss of a loved one and make the sandwiches and the pot of tea to show their care and solidarity in those lonely and difficult moments so many people experience. Surely through all of this we can see that the Gospel is being lived out by so many people in a real and active way all throughout the length and the breadth of the diocese. Surely this is a sign of hope now and for the future! Yes a great deal of sorrow has been rightly expressed in recent times but let us not forget the good and inspiring deeds that are being done every day by members of the Church community.

Later in our ceremony the oils will be blessed. They will then be brought to all the parishes of our diocese and will be used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the anointing of the sick. In baptism each one of us was anointed and given the mission that was given to Christ in the Gospel we heard this evening. This allows us to utter as Christ did,

*“The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.”*

This is a great and challenging call. The only way of truly fulfilling it is by doing what the people in the temple did... they kept their eyes *fixed* on Jesus! Surely this is at the heart of our call, it always was and yet, as we now know, the gaze of many in the Church became blurred. Now is the time for us to renew our commitment to Christ and firmly fix our gaze upon Him! There are no easy answers, no quick solutions, but if we place our trust in him, he will surely not abandon us for he is forever faithful even when we are not. We too like the disciples in the boat might fear at times that “we are going down” but Jesus’ presence assures us that we are not to be afraid, but to only have faith! May this faith, put into action, help us to be true and humble witnesses of the Gospel and may our renewed commitment and authentic Christian lives help us to open our hearts more fully to Christ.

As I mention renewing commitment, I now turn to the priests here present, who will renew their commitment before us this evening. These have been very difficult times for you. Many of you have been disillusioned by the lack of leadership in the Church and find yourselves struggling with many big questions around life and ministry within the Church. Please remember that so many people

respect and care for you. So many are inspired by your commitment to service day and night and for keeping the Church alive in so many ways in your communities and ministries. Your efforts, your generosity, your commitment is appreciated. On the day you were ordained deacon the book of the Gospels was placed in your hands and the bishop said to you, *“Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach.”* Later in your ordination to the priesthood you were invited to *“model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s cross.”* This call remains the same. I invite you to receive the Gospel of Christ in a renewed way here this evening. Renew your commitment to Jesus of Nazareth! He has called you into his service at this time, in this moment! May he inspire you with his Word and help you to live the noble message you preach. Yes you will experience the mystery of the Lord’s cross in your life as the ordination rite outlines, but when you do, do not forget that he has walked that path before you and continues to walk it with you. He is forever faithful to those he has called into his service.

The present crisis we are experiencing offers us as Church an invitation to new possibility. The crisis dares us to be authentic and faithful to the radical call of the Gospel. We have the opportunity now to build a renewed and more humble Church. Pope Benedict called in his letter for a “New vision” (#12), this new vision is not outlined but surely this “vision” has to be about, as Baroness Nuala

O’Loan reminded us last week, a Church of “openness, transparency and accountability, a Church which treasures each and every person and sees in them the face of God.” This “new vision” challenges us to walk our talk and live out our convictions and live the truth outlined in the Gospel, the rest is in the hands of Jesus Christ. As Archbishop Oscar Romero reminds us, “we are messengers, not messiahs.”

I started these words by quoting the words of the late John Paul II...

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May this hope spring forth in our hearts and may we never let that hope die! We are part of a bigger story that forever reminds us not to give up but to keep going trusting in the Lord’s love. The words of the poet Brendan Kennelly are apt and I finish with them;

*“Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
That always seems about to give in
Something that will not acknowledge conclusion
Insists that we forever begin.”*

Brendan Kennelly “Begin”