**Words of welcome given by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the opening of Mass at the conclusion of the 2018 World Meeting of Families**

Thirty-nine years ago, over a million Irish people gathered around this Cross for the Mass celebrated by your predecessor Pope Saint John Paul.  It was an historical moment.

It is commonplace to say that today you come to a different Ireland.  The Church in Ireland has gone through challenging times.  People have been wounded in the depth of their being by Church people; people’s faith has been challenged and the Church of Jesus Christ has been wounded.

This Cross which dominates our gathering today is a symbol.  It was probably never intended to be a permanent memorial.  There were times when people asked that it be removed.  There were times when this Cross appeared starkly isolated in the bleakness of an Irish winter.

In these years Ireland has had its winter moments but also its moments of spring.  Those of us who know what an Irish winter is like – and we have had good experience of that this year – know also what happens when the first rays of spring sun emerge.  Ireland changes.

Today we gather around the same cross in the hope of a spring for the Irish Church.  We look towards a spring sun that does not wish to cover up the harshness of dark days.  We wish rather to help families realise anew that the future of Ireland needs the light of the message of Jesus Christ to reappear in all its simplicity and hopefulness.

It may seem a paradox for me to say in the same breath that the faith in Ireland is strong and that faith in Ireland is fragile.  There is an intrinsic fragility in faith can steer us away from arrogance and self-centredness and as our Gospel reading will remind us, to journey with Jesus even when others “stop going with him”.

In that Gospel reading we see that it is Peter who comes to understand that there is only one to whom we can go, “the Holy One of God, the one who has the message of eternal life”.

We thank you as successor of Peter for coming to Ireland for this World Meeting of Families.  We pray for you and for the ministry that the Lord has entrusted to you.  Strengthen our faith.”