

Homily at Centenary Mass, St. Columba's Church & School, Walney

4 October 2016

(Isaiah 61:1-3; Mark 10:17-30)



Uppermost in our minds this evening, as we celebrate the centenary of St. Columba's church and school, is surely a sense of gratitude to almighty God for all the blessings bestowed from heaven on the parish in the course of the past one hundred years. A parish is first and foremost an ecclesial community, where parishioners find a home and encounter the Lord Jesus Christ through worship and the reception of the sacraments, in particular through the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass with its gift of the Lord's body and blood. Consider the many baptisms, the First Holy Communions and Confirmations which have taken place, the countless Masses which have been said down the years of the life of the parish, not to mention the funerals of those who have gone before us. A parish church and its community are like a sanctuary where the Lord is to be found.

A parish is a place where the faith is taught and lived, where gospel values are proclaimed and put into practice. At the centre of a parish community is the invisible presence of Christ who is alive and active in the lives of his people. We might apply the words of the prophet Isaiah in our first reading to this community which is St. Columba: here, those who mourn find consolation, the broken-hearted are comforted, those afflicted in any way find support, a kind word, and a helping hand. A parish community is somewhere, in Christ's own words, where the Lord's Year of favour is proclaimed. Pope Francis would say that the parish is where we are touched and embraced by the loving mercy of God, where everyone belongs, and where no person is excluded or is beyond hope.

A parish is a staging-post on the way to heaven. Here we are given sure signposts and a correct map to bring us to our true and lasting home, with the triune God in the blessedness of heaven. We are only too aware of the existence of false and misleading paths through life, and how easy it is to take the wrong turning, to go astray and so get lost. The Lord in this evening's gospel speaks of the relative value of wealth and possessions: we can have everything this world has to offer but at the same time be impoverished where true and genuine wealth is to be found. The rich young man in the gospel seemed to have everything, but something in his life was lacking.

The parish is the setting where, Sunday after Sunday, the advice, the comfort, and warnings of Christ are set before us in the Scriptures, and where we affirm our attachment to him by sharing in the Holy Eucharist, the memorial of his Passion and Death. An important part of the life of the community has been St. Columba's School, greatly cherished, and where our Catholic faith and ideals have been passed on to successive generations of children. Tonight is also one of remembering, prayerfully and with affection, the priests and parishioners of yesterday who have built up this – now one single - parish and helped make it what it is. We commend their souls to the mercy of God.

As you look to the future as a parish community and family, be of good heart. There will undoubtedly be difficulties and challenges along the road, but we have no reason to fear. Let your faith be your strength, and remember that no problem or situation is too big for God. Christ's words in our gospel this evening should be your consolation: *"All things are possible with God!"* Amen!

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