

Priestly Golden Jubilee, Bishop O'Donoghue, 21st April, 2017

Homily



St Peter has just told us, *“Always have your answer ready for people who ask you for the hope you have”* (1P3:15). The great Apostle could have written those words with reference to Bp. Patrick, for Bishop Patrick has never been short of a word or a ready answer, and in this regard he has been true to his Cork roots!

Today we gather with Bishop Patrick to celebrate and give thanks to God for fifty years of priestly service, twenty-four of which have been as a Bishop. It is no easy task to summarise such a remarkable span of years in the generous service of God’s people, first in the Archdiocese of Westminster as priest, Rector of the Seminary, Administrator of the Cathedral, and auxiliary bishop, and for ten years Bishop of Lancaster in the Northwest of England, as well as in recent years serving the diocese of Cork and Ross. So Bishop Patrick has much to give thanks for, and we his friends are pleased to join him and his family in an act of thanksgiving in the way that we Catholics know best, by the celebration of Holy Mass.

Christ’s opening words in our gospel declare that we show our love for him by keeping his commandments, and his great commandment as we know was to love our brothers and sisters. To answer a vocation to the priesthood and to follow it faithfully for fifty years, ministering to Christ’s people is a supreme expression of a person’s love for Jesus Christ. When Patrick started out on the road to the priesthood all those years ago he probably didn’t realise the different paths along which it would eventually lead him, but that is the nature with the call and purpose of God. All God asks is our generosity so that his saving plan can unfold through our response. We congratulate Bishop Patrick today on his faithfulness to his priestly vocation, on the many lives he will have touched in Christ’s name down the years, bringing something of the joy and hope of the gospel to so many.

The priesthood is Christ’s gift to the Church. Through his priests he continues to walk among his people, encouraging, healing and offering hope, as he once did in the towns and villages of Palestine. A person does not confer the priesthood on himself; that comes from Christ and is his prerogative alone. Yet an individual does have to respond deep within himself to that invitation and take the step. With the help and support of his excellent family, Bishop Patrick was generous and courageous enough to take that step and respond to Christ the priest’s invitation to him.

So, Bishop Patrick, warmest good wishes on this occasion of your golden jubilee of priesthood. We say again ‘thank you’ for your rich and fruitful years of service as a priest in the Lord’s vineyard. To quote the words of the psalmist, the Lord has indeed given success to the work of your hands! *Ad multos annos, and God bless!*

+Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster