

**CHRISM MASS**  
**ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL EDINBURGH**  
**HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN**  
**TUESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2010**

**INTRODUCTION:**

I speak to you my brother priests following on our Lenten gatherings in my own home and the Lenten Station Masses which I celebrated in the various areas of our Archdiocese.

In this the 'Year of the Priest' called for by Pope Benedict XVI, I think we have all appreciated these opportunities for being together as brother priests – and then in your parishes sharing in the great prayer of the Eucharist especially with those members of the Elect seeking the sacraments of Initiation and full communion with our Church.

As you know at our Mass this evening the oils which will be used throughout our Archdiocese are blessed and consecrated; and all of you as my brother priests renew your commitment to priestly service following on my own homily in which the instruction from the Church indicates I should **“urge the priests to be faithful in fulfilling their office in the Church”**.

Consequently you are indeed at the centre of my thoughts and prayers on this occasion while the whole congregation is invited to help us to be faithful ministers of Christ the High Priest so that we will be able to lead them to Jesus - himself described as 'the fountain of our salvation'.

**THE OFFICE AND SERVICE OF A PRIEST:**

The questions which I will pose to you after my own words remind us all of our office and service.

You will be asked whether or not you are resolved to unite yourself more closely to Christ and to try and become more like him; you are called upon to celebrate the Eucharist and the other liturgical services with sincere devotion; and you are told of the necessity of your teaching the Christian faith solely for the wellbeing of the people you were sent to serve.

Obviously it is in the words of Sacred Scripture that we are reminded of the ways in which we can fulfil that office and service to which we are called.

Jesus himself gathered his apostles around him and simply **taught them to pray**. He gave us that greatest of all prayers when he said: “When you pray, pray like this - Our Father who art in Heaven.....and gave them the words of the Our Father”.

And Jesus taught his disciples of the lifestyle they should have in that beautiful Gospel passage which we read on Ash Wednesday. He reminded them of their call to **give alms**; of the necessity of **prayer**; and of that obligation of **fasting** – all to be done in secret, so that our Father in Heaven, 'who sees all that is done in secret will reward you'.

And of course Jesus spoke of **service** particularly as we are told by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their gospels in the service of the Eucharist by **taking bread and wine**, saying “this is my body...this is my blood” and then giving it to the disciples of Jesus. St John in his gospel speaks of service in a very practical way namely that action which we will re-enact in our parishes in a few days time – the **act of washing of feet**, that most humble reminder of service that there could be.

### **SOLIDARITY WITH CHRIST HIMSELF:**

Basically from what I have already said I am sure you realise that Jesus Christ himself calls each and every one of us but especially his priests to greater solidarity with himself. Sadly we realise that we all, sometimes, fall far short of the high standards to which we are called. At times some of our brother priests sin seriously – and grave hurt and scandal can be caused.

Just two days ago we listened in our churches on Palm Sunday to the reading of the Passion of Jesus according to St Luke; and then in three days time we will listen to the Passion once more, this time in the words according to St John. I myself was reminded of words applied to Jesus in last Sunday’s Passion at Mass in our Cathedral – those words being ‘**innocent victim**’ and ‘**betrayal**’. At this time in various parts of the world we are told of many ‘innocent victims’ and those who have been ‘betrayed’ especially by bishops, priests and religious.

Along with Pope Benedict XVI we hang our heads in shame at the evils which have been perpetrated by some of our brothers and sisters who have been called to dedicate themselves to Christ and to serve his people. The Pope wrote to the victims of abuse and their families in Ireland just last week, stating: “It is understandable that you find it hard to forgive or be reconciled with the Church. In her name, I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel. At the same time I ask you not to lose hope. **It is in the communion of the Church that we encounter the person of Jesus Christ who was himself a victim of injustice and sin.** Like you, He still bears some wounds of His own unjust suffering”.

I myself as President of our Bishops’ Conference in Scotland issued a general apology on my own behalf and on behalf of our Church in Scotland in 2002 to ‘anyone who has suffered any abuse at the hands of anyone representing the Catholic Church’ – and I repeat that apology”.

It is in this spirit of communion with all those who have suffered in particular ways especially through that grievous sin of abuse that we ourselves journey through this Holy Week aware of our solidarity with our sisters and brothers who have suffered and also aware of our solidarity with Jesus Christ himself.

In some way I am sure that we all feel tainted by this sin of child abuse at this present time – whether bishops, priests, religious or lay faithful, young or old. We must continue to work together evermore closely to ensure that the Gospel message and those policies approved at diocesan and national level are observed to the full so that never again will we have to listen to the cry of the child or vulnerable adult who has been abused in any way physically or sexually by some one in a position of responsibility let alone some one who is acting in the service of the Church of Jesus Christ.

**CONCLUSION:**

We are all aware at this present time that our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI will be with us here in Scotland on the Feast of St Ninian Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2010. When I was with my brother bishops in Rome at the beginning of February of this year Pope Benedict XVI addressed us reminding us of our Christian vocation and also of the vocation of our priests. He said then that: “The witness of priests who are genuinely committed to prayer and joyful in their ministry bears fruit not only in the spiritual lives of the faithful but also in new vocations” – and he went on to emphasise “the indispensable role of the priest in the Church’s life above all in providing the Eucharist by which the Church herself receives life”!

He went on to state that “hand in hand with the proper appreciation of the priests role is a correct understanding of the specific vocation of the laity – indicating the vision of the Second Vatican Council being that wherever the lay faithful live out their baptismal vocation – in the family, at home, at work – they are actively participating in the Church’s mission to sanctify the world”.

Consequently at this Chrism Mass I urge on each and every one of you, priests and lay faithful, to take to heart that call to holiness. We have all heard that call to live in union with Jesus Christ especially strengthened by the Eucharist. May that call reach out to all peoples with that loving embrace of Christ himself especially encompassing all those who have suffered in any way.

As we pray in the Preface used in Holy Week: “The days of his life-giving death and glorious Resurrection are approaching”. We hope and pray that these coming days will be both life-giving and glorious for you and all in our Diocese.