

HOMILY FOR EASTER SUNDAY
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ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL, EDINBURGH
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INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed in a spirit of Easter joy that I speak to you this morning realising the various ways in which we have journeyed through this season of Lent. St Paul in his letter to the Corinthians writes: "Let us celebrate the feast, then, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth".

I say these words as we think of members of our Church in our own country and throughout the world at this present time; and as we look around us in civil society in our own country and elsewhere in the world. We are aware of that 'old yeast of evil and wickedness' – and we realise that we must have within us that 'unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'.

NEEDS OF THE CHURCH:

You might ask just what the 'needs of the Church' are at this present time. I would simply ask you to think back over what you have learned of the Church in recent weeks and months and particularly during this season of Lent.

We have become more aware of the failures of some members of our Church whether Bishops and Priests, religious or lay people and indeed Pope Benedict XVI in a recent letter indicates how he is aware of the human frailty of us all. Many evils have been committed throughout the world particularly with regard to the sexual abuse of children and young people. I myself as long ago as 2002 indicated my own personal abhorrence of this terrible crime and said at that time that I apologised to "anyone who has suffered any abuse at the hands of any one representing the Catholic Church". I restate and reiterate that apology today.

Crimes against children have indeed been committed and any Catholics who were aware of such crimes and did not act to report them, brings shame on us all. We can take no comfort from the fact that only a small percentage of priests committed such crimes – the impact of their sinful acts is very large – their actions, harmed the lives of their victims, caused great hatred to be directed at their innocent brother priests and left ordinary Catholics demoralised and confused.

One might say that there has been a great 'public humiliation' of the Church as in some way or another we realise that we have not been as alert as we should have been to the evils being perpetrated around us whatever our particular position. Those involved in these crimes must apologise and ask forgiveness from those who have been offended as well as of course from Almighty God himself.

NEEDS OF CIVIL SOCIETY:

We realise too that in our wider society things are not always as they should be. We perhaps have become more conscious of this as we realise that Pope Benedict XVI will soon be in our country – beginning a visit to Great Britain here in Scotland on the Feast of St Ninian Thursday 16th September 2010.

When Pope John Paul II was with us in Scotland in June of 1982 he said the following: “We find it harder to follow Christ today than appears to have been the case before. Witnessing to Him in modern life means a daily contest. As believers, we are constantly exposed to pressures by modern society which would compel us to conform to the standards of this secular age, substitute new proprieties, restrict our aspirations at risk of compromising our Christian conscience”.

These words from Pope John Paul II in 1982 find a further echo in our society today where witnessing to Christ still means that daily contest and there are still those pressures on us in modern society compelling us to lower our own Christian standards and conform to the standards of our age.

As we approach a General Election in our country we must be ever more aware of our Christian standards; we must see how each individual candidate proposing themselves for election in our constituencies’ measures up to the standards which we hold; and then we must vote according to our conscience.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PRESENT SITUATION:

In our present situation, we could be forgiven for thinking that there is no easy solution to the problems we face. How can we explain the wrongs committed by some within the Church? When faced with a ballot paper in a polling booth where should we place our ‘cross’?

I would suggest that we should no more turn away from the Church than we should turn against our democracy. Whatever flaws or personal failings afflict them, it remains the case that the overwhelming majority of priests and politicians are honourable and honest – seeking to live out their beliefs and serve society around them.

Though the sins of the few can bring pain to many, we must never lose sight of the truth at the heart of our faith. Pope Benedict XVI spoke recently of rediscovering “the roots of our faith in Jesus Christ and (drinking) deeply from the springs of living water that he offers you through his Church”.

That is indeed the message of Easter, which Pope Benedict XVI proposes to us all. After the passion and death does indeed come the resurrection in the life of Jesus Christ himself. After a similar suffering and death in our own lives and the life of the Church there must also come a resurrection to new life. Our own personal prayer, our own use of the Sacraments of the Church, a use particularly of Friday Penance and Scripture Reading must indeed give each one of us the grace of healing and renewing as we look forward to the future.

Likewise in the world of politics, we would be abdicating our responsibilities if we simply decided not to vote. Attractive though that option may seem we each bear a responsibility to begin to reshape our political system in accordance with our beliefs – we must improve political life not abandon it.

CONCLUSION:

The past weeks and months have not been easy for any one of us – and I share with you the shame of so many others in our Church near at home and far afield.

Aware of what has gone wrong in the past we must advance evermore confidently into the future having learned lessons and returned to ‘the roots of our faith’, the timeless truths which have inspired so many and ultimately the joy and promise that comes from the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we pray at the end of this Easter Mass: “Through the resurrection of his Son, God has granted us healing. May He fulfil his promises and bless us with eternal life. Amen”