

## **Rededication Homily given By Monsignor John Armitage, Rector of The Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady at Walsingham**

**29th March, 2020**

A "land of saints and sinners", this description can be applied to every country in the world, for it is the story of all men and women, who throughout their lives, have undertaken the human struggle, it is known to us all, for it is our own story. Pope Francis recently reminded us that "every saint has a past, every sinner a future" This compassionate understanding of human endeavour, gives us an insight into our everyday struggles and trials; for it is only with the help of God's grace, that we may turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, changing our lives, and in so doing, changing our world.

Fidelity to this struggle is called holiness, which is always the fruit of such a struggle. We might be uncomfortable with the word, but the truth remains, that wherever we encounter the good in the lives of others, and when, with courage, we face our own struggles in the face of fear and anxiety, it is an expression of holiness. Through this encounter, as I seek to do God's will in my life, I become the person God has created me to be. As the Holy Father reminds us, each one of us sinners has a future!

The story of our saints and sinners is the story of our country and explains who we are. A society that ignores the past, seeking to "re-invent the wheel" is in danger of leading its children to walk through minefields, but the wisdom of the Gospel, that has led our people through many a minefield in the past, can help us find where the mines are buried! In order for our culture to be life giving for each new generation it must be "Ever ancient", and with God's guidance, "Ever New" enabling the ancient wisdom and insight of faith to guide and inspire us today.

Before the altar, we have the relics of St Alban, a Roman soldier, the first British martyr of the 3rd or 4th century. At the time of his martyrdom, the Christian message had already taken root in our lands and the story of our island nations cannot be understood without recognising the role and influence of the Christian Gospel. The foundation of our laws, which ultimately derive from the codes of law within the Bible; ... the equality of all people before the law enshrined In Magna Carta, being one of its enduring legacies.

The Good News always brings together people of different lands, cultures and races together, for it speaks to our experience of being human, embracing women and men as they are, with forgiveness, respect and love, it is immediately and universally understood, that is why the Church is catholic, for it is universal and open to all. St Ignatius in the first century AD said that "wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church"

The Gospel can unite us, in the face of our differences, and there is no doubt that the people of these islands are very different. In the person of Jesus Christ, and the teaching of his Good News, light and life was given to our ancestors in the midst of great darkness. When we turn our back on this light the darkness threatens to overwhelm us.

In his Ubi et Orbi address on Friday, Pope Francis challenged us "We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick.

You are calling us (now) to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others."

Let us choose to work for a new unity in Christ that will help us re-discover and celebrate our common humanity amidst our differences where "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus". (Gal 3. 28)

In the face of the peril that we find ourselves in today, in addition to the physical resilience we need to protect ourselves, a stronger spiritual resilience will be needed to survive the ordeal ahead and to re-build our society in the coming days. The fruitfulness of England in the days to come will be dependent on the faithfulness of her people. "for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ... if we live by the Spirit, we shall also be guided by the Spirit." (Galatians 5)

And so today we dedicate ourselves, for we are the gift to Mary. We seek the guidance and protection of Mary Our Mother, in unity with all of our brothers and sisters on these Islands, under the protection of Our of the Taper at Cardigan in Wales, Our Lady of Knock in Ireland and the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes at Carfin and Our Lady of Aberdeen in Scotland.

I have been asked many times what is the difference between consecration and dedication? Consecration is what we receive, dedication is what we give. To be consecrated is to freely accept the love of God for ourselves and our country allowing this gracious offer of unconditional love, to reside at the very heart of the person and the country. Dedication embraces that love, draws it from the heart, and lets it shape our lives, and our communities, as we put this love into action. It is eloquently expressed in the inscriptions in our towns and villages that proclaim that "Greater love has no man than that he lay down his life for his friends." This is the ultimate dedication. In time of war and in the face of injustice our countrymen and women have laid down their lives. Today we are humbled by the dedication of the thousands of men and women, who in the face of such danger each day, serve the sick and those in need and enable our locked down communities to survive.

May their dedication be blessed, and their spirits be strengthened, on this day of national dedication. We are invited today make our own dedication, our own yes. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary let us offer ourselves to the service of our brothers and sisters, and be living witnesses to the power of the Good News to build the Kingdom of God changing our lives, that in turn, we may change the world.

On Wednesday we celebrated the Annunciation, the feast day of this shrine at Walsingham. We remembered the request of Our Lady to Richeldis to build a replica of the Holy House of Nazareth, so that all may share Her joy at the Annunciation, and that all who come here will find help in their need. The millions of pilgrims who have come to this place and the other Marian shrines that grace our county, in order to seek help in their need over the centuries, is eloquent testimony to both our need and our trust in the one who will always lead us to her Son. The cause of Mary's joy, which she invites us to share, is as a witness to the events of the life of her son, our Saviour; from his conception at the Annunciation, standing at the foot of the cross and joining in prayer with the Apostles after the Ascension.

Today however we are blessed with a new joy. After the annunciation Mary went quickly to visit her cousin Elizabeth in her need, the truth is that Mary has never stopped visiting her children in their need. Walsingham, Guadeloupe, Lourdes, Fatima, Knock and so many other places. "Every one of your visits is an invitation to conversion, to live a more devoted love toward all, but especially toward those who are suffering the most, those for whom your son asks us to love without calculation or conditions." (Pope Francis) Today a new visitation is at hand, and it is in the hour of our need.

When our bishops decided three years ago to undertake this re-dedication, they could never have foreseen the extent of our need at this time. Today we undertake this dedication in the "eye of the storm". We have long pondered and treasured the words of Pope Leo XIII to an earlier generation of Bishops "When England returns to Walsingham, Our Lady will return to England" in the hour of our need Our Blessed Mother has indeed returned to England!

The Dowry tour to every Cathedral, bar one, prepared us for today, but in a way we could never have imagined. The final Dowry Tour will take place in Westminster Cathedral when the storm has passed, and we shall rejoice with Our Mother in thanksgiving. In the midst of the raging storm, we take heart from an English poem of the 14th Century.

"And wherever this man in trouble stood,  
his first thought was that, over all other things,  
his strength he found in the five joys  
that the holy Queen of heaven had of her child.  
And the knight fittingly had  
on the inner half of his shield her image painted,  
so that when he beheld her his courage never failed."  
(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight)

With Joy in our lives, like Mary we shall hear the words of Gabriel, "Do not be afraid Mary, for nothing is impossible for God" Surely the most joyful words ever spoken, and when we take them to heart, and say our yes, we shall find the peace and happiness we so desire because we have the joy of God in our hearts.

St John Henry Newman reminds us that "according to our need so will our strength" Mary's joy, will be our strength, as she leads us by the hand into the very life of her Son, and as we look to her, we shall behold her image and our courage will never fail and as we listen to her words at Cana "do whatever he tells you" our joy will be complete!

Our Lady of Walsingham, pray for us.

St Joseph, guide and protector of the universal Church, pray for us.

Martyrs and Saints of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, pray for us.