

DIOCESE OF NOTTINGHAM

**Homily of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster
at the Ordination of the Right Reverend Patrick McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham
in Saint Barnabas' Cathedral
Thursday 2nd July 2015**

The last time I was in this Diocese of Nottingham was for the burial of a king. Today it is for the raising up of a Bishop.

This is the Lord's work, for it is beyond our capacities. Only he can give the gifts of episcopal character and ordination. Our Heavenly Father, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, raises up this man to be conformed to his Son, Christ the High Priest, and to join the company of Apostles, one of whom, St Thomas, we celebrate today.

We ask the Lord to raise up for us a Bishop endowed, first of all, with great wisdom.

The first reading, chosen by Mgr Patrick himself, is such a beautiful text. It speaks of our utter dependence on God, a sense founded on acceptance of our true state – 'weak and short-lived, with little understanding.' Indeed the words remind us of the gulf between worldly wisdom and the ways of God: 'For even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet without the wisdom that comes from you, he will count for nothing.' Today, we do not pray for a Bishop who will be popular or 'have a good press'. Rather, we pray for one who will open for us the ways of God.

This text originates as a prayer said by King Solomon. It is a prayer very suited to anyone who has to accept a position of authority: a parent, a head teacher, and certainly a Bishop. For a Bishop cannot avoid the responsibilities of leadership, both within the community of the Church and in our society. Both need real wisdom, especially the challenge of leadership in the ways of God in a public culture which seeks to shape society without any reference at all to God. Many, many people in our society strive to live their lives with a sense of God's presence, but now only rarely does that profound awareness find expression in our public life and culture. The images of broken-hearted holiday makers on their knees in silence on the beach in Tunisia; the gathering of a family in church for a Baptism, not at ease yet pleased to be there; and the seemingly endless procession of people who filed through Leicester Cathedral in recognition that, at long last, the body of Richard III lay where it should – before the throne of God; these, and many other moments, tell us that the small

flame of instinctive faith is not extinguished. But we need such wisdom so that our words and actions do nothing towards quenching that flame, but rather nurture it into a stronger light that can begin again to guide our actions.

For me, the moment when the new Bishop takes hold of the crozier presented to him is the moment when he accepts this role. It is a role of shepherding the faith of the people in all its authentic forms and of shepherding the people of faith wherever they are to be found. May this prayer be in our hearts today for this new Bishop, and not just today but whispered for him for every occasion in the years to come when he grasps his crozier. 'Give him the wisdom that sits by your throne ... Send her forth from the holy heavens ... that she may be with him and toil and that he may learn what is pleasing to you ... that she may guide him wisely in his actions and guard him with her glory.'

Today we also ask the Lord to raise up for us a Bishop whose heart is solely focussed on the Lord. Jesus must be his cornerstone. His life must be 'a house where God lives in the Spirit'.

In my experience, for what it is worth, the step of Ordination as a Bishop is even more life-changing than Ordination as a priest. I find this to be so because, as a Bishop, I have always missed the day-to-day ministry of parish life. As Bishops, we roam here and there, always wonderfully welcomed, always lovingly supported, but always on the move. This means a Bishop needs a strong heart for the Lord, a strong bond with the Lord, a firm foundation of love which goes with him everywhere. This is the house which every Bishop has to build, an interior dwelling for the Lord.

For me, this bond of love is powerfully symbolised in the episcopal ring given to the new Bishop today and worn hereafter. These are the words which accompany the gift: 'Take this ring, the seal of your fidelity. With faith and love protect the bride of God, his holy Church.'

In that second reading, St Paul reminded us that this holy Church is to be built on the foundation of the apostles, among whom, of course, is Thomas.

Perhaps he is the most reassuring of all the Apostles, the one nearest to us in his doubts and in the struggles of his heart to declare his loving faith in the Lord.

His namesake, Aquinas, encourages us to go beyond the faith of Thomas and to believe in that which we cannot see. He reminds us to trust what we hear – *sed auditu solo tuto creditur*. 'What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do. Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing true.' And what God's Son tells us comes in our hearing of the Gospel.

How appropriate, then, that the *Book of the Gospels* is held over the head of the new Bishop at the most solemn moment of his Ordination. He is to have ears for these words above all others. Every word that comes from his mouth is to be inspired and shaped by those divine words, by the Word of God himself.

In my somewhat fanciful imagination, the mitre, placed silently on the Bishop's head, is a continuation of the presence above him of the *Book of the Gospels*, with its bookmarks still hanging down his neck! Patrick, may the placing of this mitre on your head, today and every day, remind you of the source of all your teaching: the words of truth, spoken by he who alone is truth and understood within His Church, where he promised to be with us and guide us always.

Today we ask God to raise up for us a Bishop who will always proclaim this Gospel.

This Gospel truth is much needed in our troubled world. It calls us to proclaim fundamental values which have to be found at the heart of the kind of society to which we all aspire. These are the values, the principles, of a transcendental humanism. They both underpin and reach beyond the pragmatic values of today and rest on a hope that we of ourselves cannot fulfil. Jesus is the vision of this humanism for he is the one human being who has reached fulfilment and who makes that fulfilment attainable for every person. In the face of all the threats we face, this is our salvation. The forgiveness shown by the Christians of Charleston, Alabama, robs terrorism of its power. The mercy of Christian humanism, a mercy to be shown to all, shows up the darkness of ideologies of death and why they are to be rejected by all who believe in the mystery of God at the heart of life. These are difficult days, yet our message of mercy and of eternal life, and our witness to them, has never been more relevant.

Dear Patrick, shortly you will be newly adorned! Mitre, ring and crozier. May God raise up in you a Bishop endowed with wisdom to guide and shepherd all people, a Bishop bound so closely to his Son that nothing will ever shake your peace, and a Bishop who, in the manner of his Master, will speak words of truth with unflinching courtesy, sensitivity and clarity.

So let us proceed!

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster