

**AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED****ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL EDINBURGH****HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN****MONDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2009****INTRODUCTION:**

It gives me very great pleasure to welcome "Aid to the Church in Need" too our Cathedral here in Edinburgh this evening. I am delighted to have here with us Neville Kyrke-Smith the National Director of Aid to the Church in Need in the United Kingdom along with John Pontifex, Head of Press and Information, Dr John Watts our Scottish representative, Mr Michael Willis the Area Secretary of Aid to the Church in Need here in Scotland as well as Father Paul Morton, Scottish board member and trustee, along with so many other supporters of Aid to the Church in Need here in Scotland. I know that this celebration of Mass in our Cathedral is not just a prologue to what will happen during the rest of the evening but is of course the central part of our gathering when we bring Christ in to our midst in the Mass and then try to radiate something of the love of Christ throughout the world.

I am always intensely moved when saying the words of consecration over the bread: "This is my body!" I realise that those same words of Christ extend over the whole body of Christ in the congregation before me as well as over the peoples scattered throughout the world also again indeed the body of that same Jesus Christ.

**GOOD NEWS ABOUT AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED:**

First of all I bring you good news concerning Aid to the Church in Need. As you know the organisation has had the encouragement of the Bishops of Scotland over the years. This has meant that along with the faithful support of priests, people and many benefactors of other denominations and faiths, the work of this Catholic Charity has indeed grown in Scotland – so that Aid to the Church in Need will soon be registered under Scottish Charity Law and will in the summer be opening its own official office in Scotland itself.

As Aid to the Church in Need would readily acknowledge the compassion of the Scottish Catholics has been quite outstanding and their contributions have helped Aid to the Church in Need in the United Kingdom to give out approximately 4.2 million pounds in aid to the suffering Church throughout the world last year 2008. Of course the Charity is officially recognised as a universal public association under the Holy See and have a Board of Trustees / Directors who oversee the whole operation of Aid to the Church in Need.

The Bishops of Scotland have readily agreed to the opening of an office in Scotland for Aid to the Church in Need enabling them to fulfil Scottish Charity Law but also enabling them to more effectively fulfil their mission to the suffering Church in need throughout the world.

## **BAD NEWS ABOUT AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED:**

Having given you the good news I now pass on the bad news to you here this evening. And the bad news in quite simply that there is still need for the Church in Need!

I think that becomes evermore obvious as we listen to the news each day; as we hear accounts of returning missionaries and representatives from Aid to the Church in Need, and as you read the brochures and booklets produced by Aid to the Church in Need and a variety of other different organisations.

You will remember the founder of Aid to the Church in Need, Father Werenfried, who in his regular letters to his “Dear Friends” asked them to keep their **“promises of love” to those who suffer for the faith and are in spiritual or pastoral need.** Those “promises of love” are indeed still needed for the many millions of people who suffer for the faith and are in spiritual or pastoral need. And rather than speaking of the world in general the organisation of Aid to the Church in Need realises that there are special needs at this particular time in the Middle East, Orissa, Sudan, China, and Eastern Europe.

I know that you who are gathered here today realise something of these needs and I appreciate and thank you most sincerely for your generosity.

## **PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF CARDINAL O'BRIEN:**

I know you realise that I am not here with you quite simply to beg for money. Father Werenfried whose name I have already mentioned did indeed get the name of the “begging priest” – but he was always begging for others not for himself.

I would simply like to share with you two examples of my own many travels throughout the world in sharing something of my experiences with you to focus our thoughts together prior to listening to our principal speakers. .

### **Rwanda:**

It is now some years since my visit to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003 – but so often I find that even after a gap of some years situations do not really change. What brought Rwanda to my mind was seeing the photograph in the advertising material of ACN with a person pointing out a shattered Tabernacle after horrific attacks on Christians and Christian places of worship in Orissa in India.

I will never forget seeing a similar sight on my visit to Rwanda – a shattered Tabernacle, a church dedicated as a genocide site with the remains of the bones of bodies still piled high in the Sanctuary area, and realising that not only was there a desecrated Tabernacle, a ruined church, but a shattered and a ruined people who had to be built up before anything else could be restored.

The genocide in Rwanda started on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994 when a plane carrying the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi were shot down near Kigali Airport. At 9.00 pm the following night road blocks were set up, manned by members of the extremist Hutu militia. From here people were selected according to whether they belonged to the majority Hutu or minority Tutsi Tribes. Tutsis, and the Hutus who sought to protect them, were murdered without mercy. A propaganda of ethnic hatred and lies which surrounded the plane crash persuaded not only people to kill their neighbours, but school teachers to kill their pupils and even mothers their children. In one of the parishes which I visited, the Parish of Nyamata, a small sub parish church of Ntarama there was a sign outside the parish church which

proclaimed that “plus or minus 5000” people were killed here. As elsewhere thousands of people had sought refuge in the church in the hope and expectation that they would be safe there – but no one was safe. The murderers tossed grenades through the open windows of the church from which the rhythmic sound of African hymns normally emanated. That day only the rhythm of grenades exploding, machetes thudding into the soft flesh of those fleeing, and the hellish screams of men, women and children were heard. When I visited this desecrated church the blast marks in the walls allowed light to flood in on the hundreds of skulls neatly piled high at the end of the church. Even when I was there in 2004 the floor of the church was littered with human remains and the most mundane and pitiful collection of belongings: Here a comb, a fork, a set of rosary beads. There, an old man’s hat, a school jotter, a child’s shoe.

There were more than 100,000 people out of a total population of 7 million people awaiting trial for crimes committed during the genocide. Work has gone on and is still going on thanks to your help with the care of tens of thousands of windows and orphans, resettlement of refugees and education being provided for the poorest of the poor children, and work with regard to reconciliation, peace and justice.

### **Myanmar:**

Over the years I have visited a variety of different countries where help is urgently needed.

At the beginning of this year 2009 I journeyed to Myanmar a country in Asia which has a population of 50 million people with over 90% of them being of the Buddhist faith. Obviously the Catholic community is very small – perhaps around 5 or 6% of that great number of people – some three or four million people scattered throughout their vast country and cared for by a largely native population of priests.

It was to this very poor country that Cyclone Nargis struck some months before my own visit – and I had the opportunity of seeing the devastation caused particularly in the Diocese of Yangon and Panthein.

I listened to many stories from survivors – some who had lost not only every member of their family but every material possession which they had ever had.

One man spoke very movingly to me – his name was Luke.

He indicated that the Cyclone began on 3<sup>rd</sup> May on 3.00 pm in the afternoon and that no one had ever experienced anything like it. Trees began to fall at 5.00 pm, darkness at 6.00 pm, and at 7.00 pm the waters continued to rise. At around 1.00 am the waters rose higher and higher, the wind grew stronger with there being nothing to hold on to, and so everyone tried to grasp the trees nearby but they also were blown away. Everyone around him perished and were lost. Around 4.00 am at first light the waters started to recede but Luke said that looking around there were no more buildings and nothing was left. He returned to where he had once lived but he could not see anything – no human being, no indication of where his home had been. He then said he thought that perhaps God was teaching him that **“we human beings don’t really possess anything for ourselves”** and he ended very simply by saying “that is the feelings I would like to share with you”.

## CONCLUSION:

And perhaps that is the feeling which I would like to share with you this evening.

My own accounts of where I have visited could go on and on. You can read of other accounts and you will hear this evening of sufferings in different parts of the world.

I think helping countries such as Rwanda and Myanmar, countries such as Orissa, the Sudan, China and Eastern Europe – there are many millions of people still in need throughout the world and our giving does indeed make a difference to our lives.

However perhaps we must try evermore to understand the **spirituality of our giving – what it really means to us!**

Perhaps the lesson I am trying to teach you this evening is the lesson which Luke taught me when he said those words that: **“Human beings don’t really possess anything for ourselves”**. We may have a reasonable house, quite a good standard of living, arrangements made for our children and our own pensions in due course. But what happens when an economic recession occurs, when a bank fails, when we suddenly discover that we have no pension funds! Then in some ways we become more and more like the shattered peoples of so many countries in the world.

**The lesson is there for us to see.** At the deepest of levels we must realise that human beings don’t really possess anything for ourselves! What we have is really given to us on loan; our material possessions, the wealth we think we have in our banks or in our savings are not really for ourselves but they are for others.

May God indeed bless you all for all that you are and all that you do. Here this evening you indicate that you understand the meaning of the call of Jesus Christ from the Gospels to love others as you love yourself and indeed to give to others as you would like others to give to you.

My congratulations once more to Aid to the Church in Need on achieving an office in Scotland to help with our ongoing apostolate. **May we rejoice in sharing in that valued apostolate to those who really do not possess anything for themselves.**