

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF ST PAUL'S PARISH, GLENROTHES
HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN
THURSDAY 12 JUNE 2008

Introduction:

It is indeed a very great pleasure being with you here this evening, celebrating the Golden Jubilee of your parish and church.

In some ways, I prefer celebrating golden jubilees rather than centenaries. A centenary is obviously so much further away from the reality of this present situation; and, of course, a golden jubilee is only 50 years ago, well within the memory of a high proportion of the congregation!

Memories of 1958:

I do ask you to cast your own memories back to 1958 – those of you who are over 50 years of age and, from looking around the congregation, a considerable proportion of you are indeed like that!

I myself am one of the over 50s and for me 1958 was the year in which I indeed looked forward in hope. My hope was that I would be accepted for senior seminary for our own Archdiocese – having already been turned down when applying for priesthood when 12 years of age and looking forward to going to Blairs College in Aberdeen; and at 17 years of age, when I looked forward to going to St Andrew's College, Drygrange!

In 1958 I was completing my university degree – and was indeed living in hope that Cardinal Gordon Gray would now accept me as a seminarian.

I think in very many ways my own 'hope' was mirrored in the optimism in our Church at that time. Pope Pius XII, who had been elected Pope in 1939 at the beginning of the Second World War, died in 1958 and a new Pope had been elected, Pope John XXIII. Despite his considerable age, he too seemed to have a great spirit of hope and there was talk and eventual declaration of a Second Vatican Council, a Council to bring our Church up to date and better able to cope with changes in society continuing apace.

It was that same spirit of hope and optimism that led our own Church in 1958 to establish a parish and a church here in St Paul's, Glenrothes – with the area having previously been served from the Parish of the Chapel Royal in Falkland, a parish whose centenary I celebrated just last year.

Obviously, I do not know all of your own personal circumstances. However, I am sure that at that time you yourselves, so many of you coming from other parts of our country to live in Fife in this new town of Glenrothes, were indeed buoyed up with the thought of what lay ahead, as you faced the reality of new challenges in a new town.

This present year – 2008:

Now in 2008 perhaps there is a greater realism in the thoughts of each one of us, as we consider just where we are now and what lies ahead for us.

I myself have celebrated 43 years of priesthood: 20 of them as a priest and 23 as Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, with almost 5 years now having been a Cardinal of our Church.

There is indeed a certain greater realism in my own vision as to where we are at this present time as Church in this Archdiocese and where we should be going.

I realise more and more that buildings are not so very important although, of course, necessary.

Here in Glenrothes, your church was quite literally extended to double its size with the magnificent hall extension. Your neighbouring parish of St Mary's, Leslie was opened in 1966. Your numbers had grown over the years, but in recent years because of a decrease in the number of priests and a similar decrease in the number of students for the priesthood, as well as a decrease in the numbers of women offering themselves in religious life, parishes were combined and convents were closed. In my own life, hope changed to realism; and now, as you know, here in Glenrothes, your parishes of St Paul's and St Mary's are combined with again the Chapel Royal in Falkland Palace being linked together under the responsibility of Father Hand.

Fewer Masses are offered in your churches and each weekend Father Hand is only able to celebrate one Mass in each of your parishes.

This obviously must affect you yourselves as your own weekend programmes have to be adapted and as perhaps you have to make greater sacrifices and travel longer journeys to get to Mass to celebrate weekend by weekend your own journeys of faith and receive the spiritual nourishment which you need to live in an increasingly secular world.

Yes in the lives of us all there has been that increase in realism taking over from what we might describe as unbounded hope 50 years ago.

Looking for the future:

We might well ask just what lies ahead for us in the future.

We could say that celebrating the past indeed does lead on logically to look for the future and to appreciate lessons which we have learned.

I would suggest that here in this parish and indeed throughout the Archdiocese, we must indeed realise that there is just not an unlimited supply of priests, either coming from our own homes in this and other parishes in our Archdiocese or coming to us from Ireland, Poland or other parts of the world.

The role of the laity has indeed increased in importance and in its practice over the past 50 years in ways in which we might never have imagined possible.

We realise now that the task of each and every Christian is to take responsibility for their own growth in faith and in helping in the mission of the Church. No longer can any Christian look upon him or herself as an individual living and working in isolation. Rather, under the leadership of their bishop and priests and with increased collaboration, all must work together in unity and in love, taking responsibility, not only for the practice of their faith in their own particular part of the Archdiocese, but in the growth of that same faith.

Many discussions have taken place in our Archdiocese as we now look to the future.

Deliberations have taken place under the heading 'Together in Hope' – keeping in mind always key values in this process: 'A spirit of prayer being at the heart of all our thinking and planning; conversion of hearts; collaboration at every level of Church life being essential to the future of the Church; planning as a way of developing life in the Archdiocese; and witnessing in the world to Jesus Christ'.

As recommendations were firmed up and decisions made, a further document was produced, entitled 'Now is the Favourable Time'. The purpose of this document was to discern 'the future of parish communities and their place in the overall structure of the Archdiocese'.

This indeed is what we are doing at this present time, realising that we cannot just continue as we have done for the past 50 years – relying on having a priest in each and every parish; being aware of the fact that each priest is very much a human being and cannot be expected to assume intolerable burdens; and realising also that more and more of our parishioners are fully aware of their baptismal responsibilities and ready to assume greater responsibility for their parish, for the Church in the Archdiocese and for the outreach of the Church to other parts of the world.

Conclusion:

Now in 2008, I would not in any way forecast what the situation might be for our successors in the faith in 2058. No doubt, some of the younger members of the parish here this evening in 50 years time might look back on myself and the congregation of priests and people gathered here and think just how wrong our vision of the years which lay ahead was!

Whatever happens in the future, however, I must say that we have thought and prayed carefully about our present situation and about the possibilities for the way ahead. I do not think anything more can have been asked of us.

Filled with that great buoyancy and hope of 1958 – now in 2008 we are much more realistic as we face an uncertain future.

Now in 2008 and as in 1958 we again place ourselves in the hands of God as we continue to launch out into the future.

May that launching out indeed be a launching together in hope; and may we each continue to realise that 'now is the favourable time' for us to continue to grow together in hope and in love, inspired by that faith which led to the establishment of this and our neighbouring parishes.