

HOMILY FOR EASTER SUNDAY

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL EDINBURGH

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

SUNDAY 12TH APRIL 2009

INTRODUCTION:

I extend a very warm welcome to you all here in our Cathedral today – whether our own parishioners of the Cathedral, people from other parts of our diocese, or those who are visitors from other parts of the world. We all gather to share in the joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – and to consider the implications of this in our lives.

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR TODAY'S MASS:

I know that very many of you will have journeyed with us through the season of Lent from Ash Wednesday to this day and in a very special way have lived through those last days in the life of the Lord during Holy Week. Yesterday evening at our Easter Vigil ceremony we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and as well as renewing our own baptismal promises as we will do again shortly we welcomed members of the Elect from this parish into full communion with our Church or conferred upon them the Sacraments of Initiation. Almost 100 parishioners either native Scots or Polish parishioners shared in the life of Jesus Christ in this very special way.

The scripture readings of our Easter Sunday Mass remind us of what we were celebrating: In the Gospel reading we are given that very well known account of the discovery of the empty tomb by Mary of Magdala who told Simon Peter and the beloved disciple John what she had seen and till then we are told: "They had failed to understand the teaching of scripture that he must rise from the dead".

But perhaps as important if not even more important than that actual account of the discovery of the empty tomb is the teaching which follows from it as spelled out by St Paul in the second readings proposed for today's Mass. In his letter to the Colossians St Paul indicates that the Christian has been brought back to true life with Christ and states bluntly: "**Let your thoughts be on heavenly things not on the things that are on the earth**". And in his first letter to the Corinthians he speaks metaphorically as he says: "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed; 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**".

The **assumption** of that great preacher St Paul is that we can indeed get rid of our old ways; the old yeast of evil and wickedness, and live that new life hidden with Christ in God.

LIFE IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY:

What a contrast with the teaching of Sacred Scripture promulgated for us on this Easter Sunday to that teaching which we hear so regularly around about us in the society in which we live and indeed emphasised by our law givers. The **assumption is that we cannot get rid of sin, evil and wrong doing – rather we must try to maintain those who do wrong with increased legislation**. As a Christian I would maintain that nothing is further from the truth and rather than an ongoing rush to impose legal restraints on wrong doing of whatever kind we are forgetting dangerously that **no external restrictions can ever match the effectiveness of self restraint**.

A simple example might indicate the truth of what I am saying. The man who regularly drives me both within the City and within our Archdiocese knows Edinburgh very well having spent a fair proportion of his life as a driver with a funeral undertaker. One evening some three or four years ago he was out with his wife and on returning home through the labyrinth of roads off the Royal Mile he was stopped by the Police and charged with driving along a street in which there had been placed a “No Entry” sign. On indicating that he was a native of Edinburgh all his life he indicated that he did not know that the street had been barred to cars from about 10pm until 3am and asked the reason why. He was simply told that this was because in the late evening and early morning, indeed throughout most of the night, this street and others nearby were filled with young people giving themselves up to the abuse of drink, drugs and sex – to the extent that one young person had recently been killed in that area by a passing car. Consequently the restriction on traffic.

No mention was made of any attempt being made to curtail the abuses such as I have mentioned – rather **increased legislation was thought to be sufficient to restrain the problem.**

We might say that **in many ways Scotland is staring into the abyss of social collapse.** Too many of our young people are caught up in a maelstrom of drug and alcohol fuelled promiscuity, hedonism, vandalism and outright nihilism. I would suggest that this is a whirlwind from which we will reap for a long time to come. We are in fact now paying the price for denying too many of our young people security, stability and morality, a price paid in shattered lives and broken children.

It seems that as the human debris of our failures accumulate, our politicians have become paralysed by a chronic fear of moralising. **Instead of leadership and a moral compass, a stifling political consensus seems to compel all of our parties and our Parliament into ever more frenzied regulation.**

In recent weeks much coverage has been given to the decision by the Scottish Government to limit sales of alcohol to young people by increasing the selling price, through restrictions on a variety of retail offers, and by asking local authorities to consider raising the age for alcohol purchases. This policy mirrors the approach taken by this and previous administrations to drug use, vandalism, anti social behaviour, obesity and even promiscuity, and might usefully be called the “**command and control**” model of public governance.

No mention is made of the effectiveness of self restraint – which is indicated through our willingness to “give up” during the season of Lent.

EXTENSION OF THESE PRACTICES TO MARRIAGE:

Further with regards to **marriage and family life** we are aware that Scotland now had one of the highest divorce rates in the western world, one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates and STI statistics, which are both alarming and growing. These trends are connected, they are not coincidental. A report published in 2007 revealed that if you have experienced family breakdown you are 75% more likely to fail at school, 70% more likely to be a drug addict, and 50% more likely to have alcohol problems. Further studies have shown that children born to married parents are twice as likely to spend their childhood with both their parents, than those born to cohabiting couples.

However in face of all this evidence our Parliament has an **active legislation** making divorce easier and quicker and giving greater legal recognition to cohabitation, while our taxation system ruthlessly penalises long term legal commitment. These attacks on marriage and stable family relationships have caused unimaginable misery, pain and lifelong failure for thousands of children. They have led to disastrous social and economic consequences for our nation.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE:

Having celebrated the six weeks of Lent, the time for the Christian to practice in a special way self restraint, we must always be and remain people of hope, people who live in the hope of the Resurrection, people who live in the hope of a change in moral standards so that more and more people can lead a new life.

Christians must always believe that remedial action is never too late. We must assume that offering abortions to schoolgirls, knife amnesties to schoolboys, and clean needles to students are just not the business of our brave new society. We must do our best to modify and correct the most corrosive attitudes and behaviour that is causing our society to splinter.

Recently the Government released findings from a survey by YouthLink Scotland on attitudes, interests and aspirations of young people in Scotland. 2685 children and young people aged eleven to twenty-five were surveyed. **When asked to identify those they most trusted and respected, encouragingly the vast majority put parents at the top of the list.** Today's children are tomorrow's parents!

To help and sustain couples in their parenting **we must urgently restore support for marriage.** Marriage remains an ideal to which most people aspire and it still provides the surest foundation for strong and healthy families. Marriage encourages families to support each other and work together to the lasting benefit of society. Families need all the help they can get – now more than ever! And families who stay together should not be financially penalised for their commitment and loyalty to each other.

We must ensure that there is universal access to marriage preparation courses; to remedial and reconciliation services; and we must consider the reform of the tax credit system which currently favours children who live with a lone parent rather than with both parents. Transferable tax allowances for married couples would recognise the stability that marriage brings and acknowledge that such partnerships are foundational to stable and law abiding societies.

CONCLUSION:

On this Easter Sunday I would indicate that **we really must educate our young people, this new generation, in morality and objective truth. Rather than giving our young people a law a day to keep excess at bay we must try to impart what Pope Benedict has described as “true values which give life a foundation”.**

On Ash Wednesday as the ashes were placed on our forehead the words used were: “Remember that you are dust unto dust you will return”; “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel”. Those words are as true today, Easter Sunday, as they were on Ash Wednesday; as they were 2,000 years ago.

Each year we must try to further understand the teaching of Scripture – rise from the death of sin in our own lives and hand on the teaching of Christianity to the young people for whom we are responsible so that they too will rise from the death of sin to that new life promised by Jesus Christ.