

INTERNATIONAL CENTENARY SYMPOSIUM ON THE MARIOLOGY OF BLESSED JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

CHURCH OF OUR LADY AND ST MARGARET, DUNS

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

WEDNESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2008

INTRODUCTION:

It gives me very great pleasure to welcome you all here to Duns this afternoon to our beautiful little church dedicated to Our Lady and St Margaret.

I know that you have come on pilgrimage here from the International Symposium being held at Durham University – I would hope a welcome break for you all in the midst of deep theological lectures on various aspects of the life and work of Blessed John Duns Scotus. Hopefully here in this beautiful border country of Scotland where John Duns Scotus was born you will be able to absorb something of the beauties of nature which affected John as he was growing up and no doubt had a considerable influence on his thought.

As you know John became a Franciscan; studied at the University of Oxford; was ordained to the Priesthood on 17th March 1291; and continued his studies at Oxford before being sent to Paris. He lectured in Oxford and in Paris for a considerable number of years before he was sent to Cologne where he lectured for some time before his untimely death on 8th November 1308 at approximately 43 years of age and at the height of his maturity. It is the 700th anniversary of his death which we are commemorating at this time.

THEOLOGY OF BLESSED JOHN DUNS SCOTUS:

With so many theologians around me I hesitate to try to summarise the theology of Blessed John Duns Scotus in a few words.

However I quote from the late Father Eric Doyle O.F.M. who wrote in a pamphlet produced for the 7th centenary of the birth of John Duns Scotus: “If one were asked to summarise the vast synthesis of truth created by Duns Scotus, the answer would take no more than a few words – **a philosophy of love and of theology centred on Christ**”.

Perhaps in thinking of the theology of John we should emphasise his teaching on “**the uniqueness of each and every individual person**”; we should reflect on **his theology of “Christ and his relationship to the world”**; and thirdly of course we should realise the depth of the teaching contained in “**his defence of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady**” almost 600 years before the Definition of the Dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

Here in this beautiful little parish church his teaching with regard to the Immaculate Conception is summed up in the stained glass window above my head with the engraving of the words: “potuit; decuit; ergo fecit”; “it could be done; it would be fitting if it were done; therefore it was done!”.

SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED JOHN DUNS SCOTUS:

However it is not because of the depth of his theology that we gather today for this symposium and in this little church. It is **to thank God for the spirituality of this man.**

Even in his own time when preparations were being made for his reception of his mastership in theology, the Minister General of the Franciscans wrote: “I authorise to be presented....the beloved father in Christ... John Scotus. I am thoroughly informed, partly from my own experience and partly from his world wide reputation, of his praiseworthy life, his outstanding knowledge, his most subtle mind, and his other remarkable qualities....” Those words were written over 700 years ago.

And it was less than 20 years ago that there was promulgated the decree of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in the presence of Pope John Paul II which declared: “The fame of holiness, the virtues, and the cult from time immemorial, given to the servant of God, John Duns Scotus, professed priest of the Order of Friars Minor, born in Duns Scotland towards the end of 1265 and died in Cologne Germany on 8th November 1308”.

Many of us here present, including myself, were in St Peter’s Basilica in Rome to share in the joy of the promulgation of that decree of our late Holy Father Pope John Paul II.

CONCLUSION:

As you gather at the Symposium in Durham University and as we gather here this afternoon perhaps we should give some further thought to the **relevance of Blessed John Duns Scotus in our world of today.**

He is indeed what we might describe as a “**saint for Europe**”; we should realise how his theological thought can help us in the realisation of the uniqueness of each one of us as an individual; and we should be led on to ever deeper thought of our union as human beings in the love of God and of the role of Our Blessed Lady in our redemption.

Underlying it all however should be the realisation that basic to the depth of his theology and the ability to teach of this the “subtle Doctor” there was a good holy man, an exemplary friar, a son of St Francis, a wonderful priest, born and brought up in this beautiful border country of Scotland who grew throughout his life in his knowledge and love of Our Lord and in his desire to serve that same Lord in the simplicity of his life as a Franciscan. May we be strengthened to serve that same Lord and his people with something of the wisdom and simplicity of Blessed John Duns Scotus.