

MASS OF REDEDICATION OF REFURBISHED CHURCH AND BLESSING OF ALTAR

ST ANTHONY'S CHURCH, BALFRON

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

SUNDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2010

INTRODUCTION:

I am delighted to be here with in St Anthony's Balfron, having just celebrated Mass in your sister Parish of St Kessog's, Blanefield.

I am aware of the tremendous amount of background work which has been accomplished here in the Parish with regard to the fabric of your church and altar — and almost every move in your parish has been recorded in that wonderful history by Pat and Jim Thomson and also recorded in today's Order of Service booklet along with a synopsis of the alterations project by Terry Delaney. I know that very many people were involved in this project and I thank them all most sincerely at the beginning of my words today.

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THIS AREA:

It is known that in the time of the 6th and 7th centuries, Christian missionaries came to the West of Scotland from Antrim in the North of Ireland. Gradually a thriving Christian community was built up and over the centuries the Charter of the Parish Church of Balfron was granted to Inchaffray Abbey on 3rd October 1303.

The Catholic community increased greatly in the mid 19th century when many workmen came from Ireland to undertake building the water pipeline from Loch Katrine to the City of Glasgow. The small Catholic community was served from very many different surrounding parishes with the hopes always being that the community would one day have its own church.

Thanks to the endeavours of Mrs Mary (Butler) Cooper a Catholic who married a man of means in the area, Henry Cooper, a church was eventually built and opened in 1867. We are told that Mrs Cooper showed great tenacity in her project, demonstrated in her sometimes daily letters to Father Martin of Milngavie at that time serving the Parish and Bishop Strain of the Diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh the Vicar Apostolic of the area in which Balfron lay.

This fine building in which we are now worshipping was the fruit of the labours of Mrs Mary Cooper and she is indeed looked upon as a principal benefactress who really inspired the erection of the church in the year 1867.

Since that time again the Parish was cared for by various priests with various highlights taking place including the new layout of the sanctuary in 1977 after the Second Vatican Council and the celebrations of the 700th anniversary of Inchaffray Charter with Balfron in the Balfron 700 Festival in 2003. Incidentally, as many of you will remember, it was while I was here in St Anthony's celebrating this commemoration that the announcement of my creation as a Cardinal by Pope John Paul II took place!

From the year 2006 various plans were undertaken for the complete reordering of the church and for the erection of this magnificent new Altar. The main purpose of this was quite simply as we pray in our Mass today: “To sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his own wonderful light!”

RE-DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH AND SOLEMN BLESSING OF THE ALTAR:

As we progress through our celebrations today, we are reminded that what is important is not the wood and glass, the bricks and mortar, which constitute this church building and the Altar. Rather it is what they signify as we pray during this celebration. We pray to Almighty God that he might make this Altar and church: A sign of Christ, a table of joy, a place of communion and peace, a source of unity and friendship, a centre of our praise and thanksgiving!

And as we progress through the celebration we realise that these words are to be applied to us – the Church, the Body of Christ. We ourselves are to be a sign of Christ; we are to be a people of joy; we are to be a congregation of communion and peace, a source of unity and friendship; and this place is to be the centre of our praise and thanksgiving.

MESSAGE OF POPE BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF SCOTLAND:

As you know I have returned from the Ad Limina visit of the Scottish Bishops to Pope Benedict XVI and he addressed us as a group on 5th February 2010. Having spoken of our proper appreciation of the priest’s role, he reminded us also that we must have “a correct understanding of the specific vocation of the laity”.

As the Pope said: “The Second Vatican Council’s vision is that wherever the lay faithful live out their baptismal vocation – in the family, at home, at work – they are actively participating in the Church’s mission to sanctify the world”. He asked us to have a renewed focus on lay apostolate to help clarify the roles of clergy and laity and give a strong impetus to the task of evangelising society. This what you are called upon to do now – and then to become more and more involved in lay ministry as you are here in St Anthony’s Balfron, as indeed in St Kessog’s Blanefield.

CONCLUSION:

As we gather today for this very beautiful ceremony we remember our initial contact with Jesus Christ himself is in that common baptism which we share with other Christians as we renew our baptismal promises and are sprinkled with blessed water. We think of the ways in which our lives must be an unending prayer before the Throne of Almighty God praising him and thanking him for the good things he has given us while receiving every strength for our lay apostolate and for our ministry in the Church and in the world.

Many gifts have been given us and much has and will be asked of us. May God indeed bless each and every one of you, all who have helped in any way with this magnificent project; and indeed all of the people of this Parish and your sister Parish in St Kessog’s Blanefield in the years which lie ahead.