

+AMDG
Mass for Jubilarians
Maiville
12th August 2019.

Readings: Isaiah 12:1-5
John. 15:5-8
Psalm 127.

Homily; Rupert O Sullivan

“On that day, you will say; give thanks to Yahweh; call his name aloud. Proclaim the deeds of Yahweh to the people; declare his name sublime. Sing of Yahweh, for Yahweh has done marvellous things; let them be known to the whole world”.

Any achievement is worthy of a celebration. It is great to have a motive for gathering to celebrate the Platinum and Diamond Jubilees of Andrew, Vianney, Joe, Tom and Michael, this morning. In the course of your sixty or seventy years, your call took you on different paths; you were full of youthful energy, ready to take on the world. Today, we gather to celebrate this special occasion with you. The purpose of any celebration is to heighten and intensify the meaning of something in life. Not wishing to distract from today's celebration, we also look forward to another on Thursday in MSJ with the First Profession of Simon Fernandes.

We read in John's Gospel where Jesus came and declared a wedding, a feast, a celebration as the heart of life. He shocked people as much by the way he enjoyed life as by his message of new life. We tend, maybe, to read the Gospel selectively and ignore Jesus' positive challenge to enjoy without guilt. Today, is surely a day of *joy* and *thanksgiving*. On an occasion and a gathering such as this, we are all challenged to reflect on our own personal story. Most of us would agree that *the reason we came is not the reason we stay. We grow in our vocation. The journey is on-going.*

Celebrations such as this may invariably be tinged with a little nostalgia and a reminder too of advancing years. But overall it is an opportunity to pause, to meet, to look back, to reminisce, to reflect - individually and collectively and look forward to the future, energized by the company and presence of one other. It affords us the opportunity, too to cast our minds back to the place that was for us the well-spring, the source of our spiritual awakening and early religious formation. It was in MSJ, you made a covenant with the Lord and dedicated your lives to his service after the seed of vocation was sown in your homes and parishes.

What wonderful lives of presence, witness and service Andrew, Vianney, Joe, Tom and Michael have given on the home mission of Ireland and England and on missions across the world, in Canada, in the West Indies, in West Africa and the *barriadas* of Lima, Peru – you truly were, 'Pilgrim Brothers with the compassionate

Christ in an evolving world'. You witnessed to Brotherhood and to the charism and mission of Blessed Edmund Rice – and we will never know the many lives you have enriched by your love, sacrifice and generosity.

How was all this possible for you, Brothers, during your years of religious life? Not by human effort alone, but by the grace and power of the Almighty – a faithful God who is always with us on the journey of life. In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds us, 'I am the vine, you are the branches (15:5). 'It is to the glory of my father that you should bear much fruit'. We give thanks that we have seen this Gospel come to pass in the lives of Andrew, Vianney, Joe, Tom and Michael.

But there is a great deal of life still to be lived. It simply depends on how you live it. To quote Joan Chittester, a Benedictine Sr. “ *We can die years before our time, or we can live until we die.*” Where age predominates, she says, “*the community mind must become a young vision rooted in old values*”.

Pope Francis continues to challenge us too when he says; *for some years now, instead of going forth, we seem to be returning.* We need to continuously ask the question: “Where is God leading us now?” Our communities, he said, “*should be like airports where there is a constant taking off to new places without delays, without fear.*” *We may not need to move outside our own communities to find new places and new ways of living and telling our story.*

There is a temptation for any of us to say; 'I have done my bit', be it in Ghana, the West Indies, Peru, Canada or on the home front. Surely, this is a time for new opportunities; to grow in self-knowledge, in self-awareness and pursue new interests. Our greatest pastoral ministry may yet be awaiting us. I acknowledge how individual Brothers and communities continue to make a difference, not least in this community.

The Jubilees we joyfully celebrate today are milestone occasions not only for ourselves but for those associated with us, our family and friends, because we are so much a product of the people we come from and minister to. Each of us makes our own individual journey to God. Many people have crossed our path and supported us; we sometimes, perhaps, received more than we were able to give. We remember, too, in prayer and fond memory those we have lost through death and to various alternative pathways in life. And of course Christ the Good shepherd is always guiding us. We are encouraged by the words of the psalmist: “Unless the Lord builds the House, the builders labour in vain.”

Fr. Jim McManus has some good advice in, 'Searching for Serenity' where he says: *the material challenge is to manage in this brave new world: to find a way through the complexities of an ever-changing life and to stay connected with the world around us. This makes sense from a purely practical point of view. It's hard to function if we're out of step with the world. It's far easier to at least try to master the*

new technology, the new ways of living, than to swim against the tide. Psychologists find, too that people who stay, closely connected to modern life are likely to be physically and emotionally healthier than those who are alienated. Alienation is an inherently negative state, associated with depression and isolation. It's the very opposite of the love of life that the French call joie de vivre.

Have we not experienced from time to time how people may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel! Kofi Annan, a former secretary general of the UN was renowned for his compassion and sense of God. He had a tree in his garden called the 'thinking tree'. Perhaps we, too, can focus on an object or event that will remind us to keep thinking and reflecting on new and exciting ways to tell our story. I acknowledge the efforts many Brothers are making to tell their story. I hope there are more personal stories to follow.

I alluded to already that there have been moments in all our lives – difficulties, challenges and indeed, regrets. Such set-backs can be a blessing in disguise. A well known story, familiar to us, captures this in simple terms. An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to her home, the cracked pot arrived only half-full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishment. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream. “I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house”. The old woman smiled. “Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot’s side? That’s because I have always known your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house.”

There is a little anecdote which I came across somewhere. It reads; a group of people gathered to offer their condolences and to pray for the repose of the soul of a man in the neighbourhood who had died. One man who was particularly courageous and a little curious, ventured to ask the question: “What did he – the dead man – leave?” The answer came from a quiet man in the corner: “He left everything!” Is that something we would like others to say about us, one day? Strangely, it was what we promised when we entered Religious Life!

A jubilarian who is present here, once, advised me when giving a homily to aim at writing whatever I wanted to say succinctly that it should fit on the back of a postage stamp. On this occasion that reads simply: rejoice, jubilarians and give thanks, live

each day as if it were your last, and look to the future with hope in the Lord.

I conclude with a poem, I came across by Daniel Berrigan called 'Some'. I think it sums up much of what could be said about any of us in life.

Some stood up once
and sat down.
Some walked a mile
and walked away.
Some stood up twice
then sat down.
I've had it, they said.
Some walked two miles
then walked away.
it's too much, they cried.
Some stood and stood and stood.
They were taken for fools
They were taken for being taken in.
Some walked and walked and walked.
They walked the earth
They walked the waters
They walked the air.
Why do you stand, they were asked, and
Why do you walk?
Because of the children, they said, and
Because of the heart, and
Because of the bread.
Because
The cause
Is the heart's beat
And the children born
And the risen bread. Amen.