

Homily of Bishop Donal McKeown on the Eve of the 20th Anniversary of the Omagh Bombing - Sacred Heart Church, Omagh - 14 August 2018

Link : <http://www.derrydiocese.org/component/easyblog/entry/news/homily-of-bishop-donal-mckeown-on-the-eve-of-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-omagh-bombing-sacred-heart-church-omagh-14-august-2018?Itemid=549>

This day next week sees the start of the World Meeting of Families in Dublin. So, perhaps it is not surprising that the World Meeting has been a lens through which many people have been seeing the feasts of the Church's year in 2018 as well as the recent Sunday Gospel readings. After all, our faith is not just a series of disconnected religious beliefs but rather an integrated way of viewing the world. The encounter with Christ is an event that radically changes how we view life and death, relationships and responsibilities, mistakes and forgiveness. Faith means meeting Jesus, not just acquiring theological trivia. Knowing Jesus changes everything.

Thus the Feast of the Assumption is not just a quaint idea about Our Lady that was dreamed up in 1950. It fits into the rich spectrum of Catholic beliefs.

Firstly, our way of looking at the world places a lot of emphasis on our belonging in the Body of Christ and our relationship with the Communion of Saints, which all Christians acknowledge every time we say the Apostles' Creed. The Book of Revelations talks about *a multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.* (Rev 7:9) In the Church we are joined to that multitude of every age, the family under God the Father, among whom Mary has pride of place.

Mary not only plays a role in the Church which is the Body of Christ – but she is honoured because she bore the body in which Jesus was born. *'Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb'*, says Elizabeth to Mary. I come to God, not just on my own, not just with the people in the pew along with me, but in company with the angels and the saints. Any celebration of the Mass invites us to share in the Eucharistic Body of Christ so that we can build the Body of Christ, the Church so that it can be bread broken for the world. Because Mary was the one who bore the Word made flesh who dwelt among us, she is never far from those who are members of the Church. Along with millions of saints, Mary was saved by the death of her Son on Calvary. We who have known forgiveness in Christ cannot be separated from all those in God's family who have been similarly blessed.

Secondly, the doctrine of the Assumption fits in with another element in the Apostles' Creed – *'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'*. The belief in the resurrection of body is clear in the New Testament writings. That is not just an assertion of life after death but a statement that our imperfect human bodies are sacred and precious for they will be raised up in glory on the last day. They are described as being Temples of the Holy Spirit which no longer belong to us (1Cor 6:19-20). They are graced by the sacraments which touch our flesh. In a culture that says the body is for fun and the body beautiful is everything, the scriptures tell us that the human body, in all its imperfections, is sacred. Thus relationships and intimacy are sacred. We are not animals. Abuse of our own/others' bodies is sinful and destructive of human dignity. The Gospel of the Family is joy for the world for it speaks of our dignity and our call to holiness through living in our bodies.

Thus belief in God is not a distraction from real life. The Assumption of Mary is described in the Preface as *'the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people'*. Mary has gone where we are all called to go through the merits of Jesus. Mary is part of the Church and not separate from it. Because of the resurrected body of Jesus, we are all called to share fullness of life with God with her. The Resurrection in which Mary has shared is a call to fullness of life here and hereafter.

Thirdly, we gather this evening on the eve of the 20th anniversary of that terrible day in 1998 which claimed so many lives in Omagh. The bomb that killed young and old also scarred so many others in body and in mind. Those scars, those memories, those losses will never go away. Many people continue to limp through life because of the brutal actions of others. For this town, something changed forever that day. And this community has found ways of remembering their loved ones in a quiet and dignified way.

However, don't underestimate what you have done. Your work here is not just important for this area. Your ways of remembering and honouring have pointed to the fact that, in every conflict, it mostly innocent civilians and not combatants who do the dying. Your memorial here is a monument to all the innocent who were torn from us by violence in our community. Combatants do fighting but it is mostly civilians who do the dying. Some causes may be

worth dying for. No cause is worth killing for. Any story we try to tell about our conflicts has to weep for the past and never glorify any of it.

But Christians weep with the strange belief that, even brutality and stupidity cannot separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus. We may stand with Mary in tears of incomprehension at the foot of our Cross – but we now know that Resurrection lurks behind every Calvary. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can learn to tell our story in a way that does not stop at our personal Good Friday but lives in hope of Resurrection. That story can help us all see through the tears.

The Assumption reminds us that death and violence do not have the last word. The last word belongs to Word of God who was made flesh and dwelt among us. For we do believe in the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

+Donal McKeown

Sacred Heart Church Omagh

14th August 2018

Eve of 20th Anniversary of the Omagh Bomb