

# **Homily by Archbishop Clifford at Thanksgiving Mass for Cardinal Brady St John Lateran Basilica – Monday 26th November 2007**

*“How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?”*

We can all identify with the psalmist’s sentiments after the last three memorable days in the Eternal City for the Consistory. How proud, how happy, how grateful we all are to God and to our hosts in Rome. The elevation of Sean Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, to the College of Cardinals, has made us all walk tall and walk with a new spring in our step, including his family and friends, lay and clerical.

The psalmist answers his own question;

*“How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?” as follows: “The cup of salvation I will raise. I will call on the Lord’s name. A thanksgiving sacrifice I will make, I will call on the Lord’s name”.*

Our thanksgiving sacrifice, of course, is the Mass. The word “Eucharist” itself means “thanksgiving”. This is no more worthy offering to God Our Father than his Beloved Son, crucified, dead and risen, in whom he is well pleased. With Cardinal Sean Brady as our Chief Celebrant, we have come to the altar of God, the God who gives joy to our youth and to middle and old age also.

This Basilica of St. John Lateran holds very special memories for our new Cardinal, his classmates and some of his family members who are here this afternoon. It was in this Basilica, *“the Mother and Head of all the Churches in the City and in the World”*, that he, and six others of us, were ordained priests on February 22nd 1964. We used to walk in our soutanes over to the nearby Lateran University every morning at 8.00 am, fighting our way through the Roman traffic – mainly small Fiat cars and Vespa scooters then.

During our four years as seminarians in Rome, we were regularly greeted by a beggar-woman standing on the street-side on our way to class. *“Buon Giorno Padre”* she would say to us. We called her *“Signora Buon Giorno”* and we were flattered to be addressed as *“Padre (Father)”* as we were only students and had yet to complete our studies and be ordained priests.

So, we always gave her a modest ten lire. On the morning of our ordination, we explained to her that we were about to be ordained priests that day, and we gave her a more generous contribution. Arising from our conversation we were delayed and ended up arriving late in the Sacristy. All the other candidates were lined up and ready to process out. The Master of Ceremonies was annoyed when he saw us and announced to all in sundry: *“Here come the Irish – late as usual!”* This needled me, so I informed him, in Latin, that a little bit of courtesy would not go astray on our ordination day. I went on to tell him that, while the Irish may be late at times, the Irish are always faithful: *“Hiberni aliquando tardi sed semper fideles.”* As Sean and I then led the procession on to the altar, our chasubles over our arms, the Master of

Ceremonies followed us and apologised. I accepted, saying that we were all on edge before the great occasion.

I have often wondered since that day why it was Dermot Clifford and not Seán Brady, who took up the defence of faith and fatherland, considering that he was a far bigger man and much better at Latin than I was! But he was calm, cool and level-headed, even then and he did not take offence as quickly as I did. These qualities have stood him in good stead over time and saw him, for example, sitting down in Stormont, for a *tete tete* with Dr. Ian Paisley and also, in recent years, to receive and accept an invitation to the installation of the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church In Ireland, Dr. Ken Newell. This was the first time ever that a Catholic Primate has attended this ceremony.

Cardinal Brady's contribution to peace in the North has been generously acknowledged by leaders all across Church and State in Ireland, North and South. This in itself is both unprecedented and most welcome. Obviously, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, himself, is aware of Cardinal Brady's efforts to consolidate peace in our country. Being unassuming, Cardinal Brady does not seek the limelight. Ever ready and never in the way, he lends a hand to all others who have been engaged in the peace process. The success of the Northern peace process has been described by the Holy Father as a model for the rest of the world in the area of conflict resolution.

Cardinal Traglia, an old and dignified Italian, ordained us here under the Apse and we concelebrated our first Mass with him – the only concelebrated Mass in existence then – a survival from earliest times. I think his last words to us in his address were, "*Imitate the mysteries you celebrate and always be mindful of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve*". Our new Cardinal got a further instruction from Pope Benedict as he conferred the Red Hat – "*Be a fearless witness to Christ and His Gospel even to the point of shedding your blood*". The deep red symbolises the shedding of blood.

Now to come to our readings this evening:

#### 1. First Reading – Water/Washing

Ezekiel. A stream of water from a hidden spring beneath the house of God, the temple. The waters flow through a barren region into the Dead Sea. These waters flowing from the Temple of God are waters which bring life to a lifeless region. (In Revelation 22:1-2 (echoing Ezek) the life-giving waters flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb).

Jesus is source of life-giving water – he is the new Temple.

See John 7:37-38 – Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water". John 19:34 – "One of the soldier's pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out".

This is the most radical expression of love, *agape* ever expressed on Earth as Pope Benedict said in his homily yesterday.

#### 2. Second Reading – Temple/Building

Ezekiel describes the temple as a source of life-giving water.

St. Paul 1 Cor 3: A Christian is a temple of God, livened by the Spirit – life-giving in one's

turn.

A Christian community is God's building. A Christian should be a builder (v.10). What we build must be firmly based on the one sure foundation: Jesus Christ.

The Holy Father instructed our new Cardinal at the Mass of the Rings he was to be a Master Builder of community and of peace in his own country.

### Authority

John 13. The St John's text is a teaching on authority as service. "I have set you an example". The disciples are not to look only to his ultimate gesture of love: humble service should characterise all the living of his followers. Here is a moving lesson on *diakonia* - service. Jesus is indeed Lord and Teacher; he has authority. But his style and exercise of authority is marked by service. It follows that true union with Christ in the Eucharist, and consequently true union among Christians, is possible only in this atmosphere of loving service.

V. 14. "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet". Jesus calls his disciples to repeat in their lives what he has done for them. The footwashing is to be linked with the death of Jesus. The theme of death is behind the use of the word *example* (v.15). "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many".

The Gospel:

John 13. Jesus began to wash his disciples' feet. Peter protested strongly. "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." A demonstration of Jesus' love for his own: he loved them *eis telos* – to the end/without limit. He laid aside his garments as he had spoken of laying down his life (10:18). The disciples are to have "a share" with him (13:8): the washing of the feet expresses symbolically that they are brought into communion of life with Jesus through his death, a supreme act of self-giving and humble service. The foot washing occurs at the table of the last Supper. Though John does not have the words of institution (as the Synoptists do) the setting clearly implies the Eucharist. The Eucharist, the meal at which we receive Christ as bread and wine, is the special sign, the "sacrament" of this faith. The reality which Christ gives to us in the Eucharist is himself as the "man for others".

But with what sense of amazement must the Twelve Apostles have heard the words, "*This is my body. This is my blood. Do this in memory of me*". The promises at Capernaum were now fulfilled. Now they understood.

Our new Cardinal gives example of authority as service. His is unassuming. His sister, Kitty, said of him that even after he became a Bishop, he remained a Priest. I don't think this was a theological statement on her part – we know what she means! I recall a story of a holy monk, Honoratus of Lérins, who avoided priestly ordination for as long as he could, but "*after he became a priest he retained the humility of a monk*".

We can look forward then to Cardinal Brady exercising his authority with the same gentleness and sure-touch that he has displayed as Rector of the Irish College in Rome, in his Archdiocese of Armagh and as President of the Irish Bishops' Conference. But will there be a change now that his is a Cardinal? I doubt it very much! He will not guard his dignity – he will rely on his dignity to guard him. Should he run across Signora Buon Giorno, on his way back from the Lateran Basilica this evening, I am sure that he would not wish her to raise the bar from "Buona Sera Padre" to "Buona Sera Eminenza"! Knowing Cardinal Brady as I do, the old

greeting of “Padre” will more than suffice!

We have all experienced his hospitality at the Irish College when he was Rector. He had time for everyone. He took in a homeless old man from the West of Ireland and earned his gratitude. Sean always had a big heart.

At the time of our ordination back in 1964, we assumed that our main task in the Church would be one of maintenance since we were soon to return to the *“Island of Saints and Scholars”*. There was no real challenge back then we were led to believe. Recently, Cardinal Brady stated that the *“Island of Saints and Scholars”* has given way to the *“Island of Stocks and Shares”*. The *“Saints and Scholars”* have taken quite a bashing in recent years: there has been a serious fall-off in Mass attendance as well as in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. These changes have been accompanied by an increase in secularisation of our society – an issue that the Holy Father specifically addressed over the weekend during the Consistory.

The Challenge now facing the Irish Church, of which Cardinal Brady is leader, is one of major rebuilding. One recalls the words St. Francis heard, *“Francis, build up my church”*. As he himself stated on Saturday in his address to the media after being created a Cardinal by the Holy Father: *“These have been difficult, at times traumatic years, for the Church in Ireland. Yet in the midst of these challenges, the overwhelming majority of priests and religious have continued to serve their people in humble patience, with quiet devotion and outstanding generosity... I (also) have no hesitation in saying to the lay faithful of Ireland today: take heart!”* I strongly agree with the Cardinal’s timely call that the lay faithful play an increasing role, now and into the future and indeed in his very encouraging words to the priests and religious of Ireland.

Not in any way wishing to talk down the economy, which is inevitably subject to business cycles, an ancient writer reminds us: *“In the day of prosperity, adversity is forgotten, and in the day of adversity, prosperity is not remembered”*.

Stocks and shares have come in for a battering also over the last few weeks in what was described by one leading newspaper as a *“loveless”* Dublin stock market. Obviously the love affair between investors and the markets is cooling somewhat! Irish investors are nursing losses of over 8bn euro last week alone. While one hopes that our economy can turn around these huge losses, especially worrying to those nearing pension age, now might be the moment when the *“Island of Saints and Scholars”* begins to make a comeback.

And how might this be achieved? A return to Sunday Mass is a good starting point. The Irish people are famous for their devotion to the Mass and their attendance, even during penal times, when such faithfulness involved high risk to livelihoods and even to life itself. When the people of Rome emerged from 300 years persecution they attributed the survival of the faith as follows: *“Sine Domenico non possumus”* – *“Only for the Sunday (Eucharist) we would have been lost”*. . The famous conclusion of the last Lord Lieutenant to Ireland, Augustine Birrell, was: *“It is the Mass that matters, it is the Mass that makes the difference, so hard to define, so subtle it is, yet so perceptible, between a Catholic country and a Protestant one, between Dublin and Edinburgh, between Harve and Cromer.”*

In this context I recall the appeal of the late Pope John Paul II, to: *“Rekindle your sense of amazement at the gift of the Eucharist which is not just any gift, rather it is the gift par excellence since it is the gift of his person in his sacred humanity as well as the gift of his saving work”*.

When we ask young people today why they do not attend Mass, they often say it, the Mass, is boring. When you question them further, their complaint usually comes down to the homily - it does not relate to their lives. I know full well the difficulty which faces the priest in the parish in trying to have something fresh to say to the same congregation week in week out! It is a challenge for even the most conscientious and dedicated preacher. Pope Benedict XVI says that we need to find a new language to connect with the people today in order to recall the freshness of the Gospels.

The Synod of Bishops in 2005 had the Eucharist as its theme. Archbishop Sean Brady made a very significant contribution. The Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Benedict shows how his contribution has been taken on board with regard to the homily.

*“The catechetical aim of the homily should not be forgotten. During the course of the liturgical year it is appropriate to offer the faithful, prudently and on the basis of the three-year lectionary, “thematic” homilies treating the great themes of the Christian faith, on the basis of what has been authoritatively proposed by the Magisterium in the four “pillars” of the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** and the recent **Compendium**, namely: the profession of faith, the celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ and Christian prayer. The Holy Father then includes *Propositio 19*, Dr. Brady’s proposal:*

*To this end the Synod has called for the preparation of pastoral aids based on the three-year lectionary, to help connect the proclamation of the readings with the doctrine of the faith.*

Another reason for the fall-off is that as a Church, we have failed to emphasise the significant link between the Mass and charitable works – the love of neighbour in which our people are very generous, our young people, in particular. They do not always see their charitable works as flowing naturally from the Mass. Pope Benedict speaks of *“living according to the Lord’s Day”*, St. Irenaus’ phrase. It highlights the connection between the reality of the Sunday Eucharist for the Christian life during the other six days. The Mass is not the end – it is only the beginning. *Ite missa est*, is not a dismissal it is a call to mission!

Archbishop Joseph Cassidy commenting on the washing of the feet in St. John’s Gospel wrote: *“The modern equivalent of washing the feet would be to look after our ageing parents or grandparents, to be very good to our neighbours, especially when there’s trouble; to be tender towards the sick; helpful to the handicapped; welcoming towards the stranger; generous towards the poor. We can wash people’s feet without taking off their shoes at all. We can have a towel over the arm that nobody actually sees. The whole point is that we don’t lord it over anybody. We serve and we love as Jesus loved. That’s the example. And that’s the challenge.”* The theology of the Eucharist is much better expressed in poetry than in prose. Hymns such as *Sancti Venite* of Irish origin in the sixth century, St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Adoro Te* and the *Ave Verum* attributed to Pope Innocent VI say it best.

**Ave Verum**

Hail to thee! true Body sprung  
From the Virgin Mary's womb!  
The same that on the cross was hung  
And bore for man the bitter doom.

Thou whose side was pierc'd and flow'd  
Both with water and with blood,  
Suffer us to taste of thee  
In our life's last agony.

O kind, O Loving One,  
O sweet Jesus, Mary's Son!