

Homily at the Pontifical Mass

At St. Thomas of Canterbury & English Martyrs' Church, Preston – Erection as a Shrine Church & Transfer of the Church to the Institute of Christ the King, Sovereign Priest

24th September 2017

(Eph.3:13-21. Luke 14:1-11)



In his letter to the Ephesians the apostle Paul prays today that we may come to know the surpassing knowledge of the love of Christ, so as to be filled with all the fullness of God. This is surely the aim of the Christian life: to discover ever more the profound depth of Christ's love for us, and so enter through faith into the very life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through her liturgical worship the Church wishes to lead her sons and daughters into what the Apostle calls the mystery of Christ, being united with the incarnate Son in his prayer and sacrifice of himself to God the Father. With good reason the Church concludes her prayers in the liturgy with the formula, 'through Christ our Lord,' for it is Christ alone who gives efficacy to our worship and prayer.

The décor and beauty of our church buildings, such as the one we are in today, are intended to assist us raise our hearts and minds to the One who is the source of all order and beauty in the universe, the Lord God almighty. It is a cause of great joy to me and to the Diocese of Lancaster that the life of prayer, devotion, worship and above all the sacrifice of the Mass long established in English Martyrs church will now continue into the future, thanks to the gracious generosity of Mgr Wach and the Institute of Christ the King, Sovereign Priest. This splendid iconic church, so dear to so many past and present Preston generations of Catholics, will still fulfil its mission through its cycle of liturgical and devotional life of leading the faithful to the springs of living water, promised us by Christ.

At the heart of all liturgy is the person of Christ himself, for he is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last (cf. Ap. 1:8). Triumphant over the powers of darkness, sin and death, he the risen Lord stands triumphantly in our midst giving an infinite value and worth to our prayer and praise. As he once healed the afflicted man in our gospel story, his healing and transforming spiritual power remain on offer to us whenever we come together in his name as a liturgical community. As human beings, made up of both body and soul, a dignified liturgy should touch us both spiritually

and physically. Sacred music and plainchant, reverent silence and prayerful reflection, features of the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, can give us a real, if fleeting, sense that we are in the presence of the Other, who is the thrice-holy God.

A fresh chapter begins today in the life of St. Thomas of Canterbury and English Martyrs church. It is not a break with the past, but this wonderful church has been given a new lease of life, and so remains a house of prayer reminding all Catholics of the wonderful and inspiring legacy of the Lancashire martyrs. May the beauty and dignity of the liturgy performed here each day give fitting praise and glory to God, and unite us here on earth with St. Thomas and the Lancashire martyrs who now worship eternally in the heavenly liturgy at the throne of the lamb in God's Kingdom.

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