

# **Cardinal Vincent Nichols' Homily at Cardinal O'Brien's Requiem Mass**

**Church of St Michael, Westmoreland Road, Newcastle  
5.4.18**

'There is a truth, deep in our Catholic tradition, often forgotten in our days, yet very relevant to this moment. It is this: that every funeral Mass is above all else a prayer for God's mercy for the one who has died. So often services after a death are seen to be a time for celebrating a life, for recognising the great achievements of a life now ended and for treasuring happy memories.

Yet the emphasis of our tradition is somewhat different. Always, we gather to ask God's mercy for the one who has died, today for Cardinal Keith O'Brien. We do so with trust and love, knowing that God's promise of mercy is enduring and that our prayers, entering into the presence of the Father through, with and in Jesus, the beloved Son, will be heard.

In recent days, the life of Cardinal Keith has been laid bare. We all know its lights and its darkness; we need not spend time talking about them even more for he has given us the key words. In his last will and testament he wrote: 'I ask forgiveness of all I have offended in this life. I thank God for the many graces and blessings he has given me especially the Sacrament of Holy Orders.' Today, as we pray for the repose of his soul, we also pray for all those he offended and ask God to strengthen them at this time.

In seeking the mercy of God, Cardinal Keith follows in the footsteps laid out for us in our Faith. St Patrick, whose name Keith Patrick O'Brien was proud to bear, wrote in his Confessions these words: 'It is with fear and trembling that I should be awaiting the verdict that's coming to me on that (judgement) day, when none of us can go absent or run for cover; and when every last one of us will have to answer for even our smallest sins at the court of Christ the Lord.'

This is, indeed, the pathway we all have to trace.

Pondering on the mercy of God is what we should do today. You will recall the Year of Mercy. During it, Pope Francis encouraged us to 'rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them.' The Pope also explained to us that 'Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy', adding, 'Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.'

Now this is what we have heard in this morning's Gospel passage taken from St Luke. The two disciples are making their sad journey away from Jerusalem, a name that it used to represent the Church, the presence of God among His people.

The two disciples, then, are walking away from the Church, disappointed in all their hopes, disillusioned by what they have seen and heard. But, see what the Risen Jesus does: he goes to walk with them, continuing their journey in the direction that they are going, away from Jerusalem. He does simply tell them to turn back. No, he walks with them. He accompanies them. He listens fully to their dismay and their sense of being let down. Only gradually does he invite them to see beyond that dismay and begin to speak to their hearts.

Even when he sits at table, he does not tell them to return to Jerusalem. He simply shows himself to them. The decision to return is one that they make, moved by the compassion they have found in him.

In this account, we see the mercy of God at work, in the person of Jesus, coming to us in our dismay, in the prison of sin which we construct around ourselves, and opening for us to door through which we can retrace our steps back to him.

In the life of Cardinal O'Brien, as well as his failings, there was goodness, courage and many acts of simple kindness. Not least was his determination to serve the poor of the world. But when we come to stand before God we do so best when we come empty-handed. No matter how great or slight our achievements might be, we cannot depend on them. No, we come before God empty-handed so that we can receive the one thing necessary: a full measure of Gods' mercy.

Only in this way can we hope to enter into the promise that was proclaimed in the first reading of the Mass. 'On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food! A feast of well-aged wines, strained clear.' This is an image we can all understand and one for which we long, notwithstanding our unworthiness.

But then we are consoled with the next words: 'Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces and the disgrace of His people.' This too is the promise of the Lord. The healing of the wounds we have inflicted and the wounds we ourselves bear, is his work. It is a work that cannot be accomplished without Him. Yet as His work, it is a task in which we are to be his active servants and never simply sit on our hands. The promise of the heavenly banquet is for all; the task of healing and finding forgiveness is also for all.

I started with words from the Confession of St Patrick. So let me end with some more. Here is St Patrick's faith, loud and clear. Let us make it ours today.

He wrote: 'I haven't a doubt in the world that, on the day appointed, we shall rise up again in the brightness of the sun; that is to say in the glory of Jesus Christ Our Redeemer...since it is from him and through him and in him that we are going to reign. But the sun he bids to rise, morning by morning, for our benefit, will never reign, nor will its glory last. Christ is the true sun whose glory shall not fade. We who believe in him, and worship him – in fact anyone who does his will – shall live forever, because Christ lives forever, reigning with God the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.'

This is our prayer today, especially for Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.'

