

Homily - Mayo Day 2018.

The Mayo Foundation website has three logos;
Mayo: Connecting Diaspora, strengthening communities.
Mayo: A county that cares.
Mayo: "We're not a just crowd; we're a family"

Allow me to reflect briefly on one of these; Mayo; "we're not just a crowd; we're a family". Our gathering for this important occasion, Mayo Day 2018, takes place during the months of preparation for the World Meeting of Families, which will take place in Dublin next August, when Pope Francis will visit Ireland. On that occasion families from all over the world will gather in our country to think about the role of family life in our lives, in the life of the civil society of our country and, in particular, in the life of the Church on this island and around the world.

Pope Francis is very clear and realistic when he talks about the importance of family in our lives. He says that there is no perfect family on earth; which is a consolation for all of us, especially when difficulties and misunderstandings arise between family members. He sees forgiveness as being at the heart of all family relationships. He equally says that as Christians we can't have a full experience of the richness of family life unless we allow space for God in our families. And he comes very close to the experience of most families when he says;- and, coming from Argentina and Italy, here he shows his Latin temperament: "In families, there are difficulties. In families, we argue; in families, sometimes the plates fly; in families, the children give us headaches. And I'm not even going to mention the mother-in-law. But these difficulties are overcome with love. Hate doesn't overcome any difficulty. Division of hearts doesn't overcome any difficulty. Only love is capable of overcoming difficulties. Love is a festival. Love is joy." Then he tells us something which our own experience has already taught us; "The true joy experienced in the family is not something casual or accidental. It is a deep joy born of the profound harmony among persons, which gives us a taste of the beauty of being together, of supporting one another along the journey of life. Pope Francis puts his finger on the bonds that draw all of us together as families and as communities and connects us with our native place. These bonds give us what he says; a taste of the beauty of being together, of supporting one another along the journey of life. And this is what makes us what the Mayo Foundation web-site says we are; "we're not just a crowd, we're a family".

The Mayo Family.

The Mayo family today is rich and varied. When, for example, people ask me where I come from I always say 'Co Limerick by birth, Mayo by adoption'. And those who like me claim Mayo by adoption and are living in Mayo at present are very varied; coming as we do from many of the Irish counties as well as many other parts of Europe such as Poland and many other parts of the world, such as India and Africa. Then, on the other hand, the Mayo family living abroad in the Diaspora is also vast and varied. According to the Mayo Foundation web-site about 3.5 million people with some roots in Mayo are to be found in all corners of the globe. This evening all of us, Mayo by birth or by adoption, are united in one great family gathered in this Cathedral around the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Pope has three hallmarks which distinguish a family from a crowd; the fact that we accept that no family and none of us is perfect, that difficulties are part and parcel of the experience of family life and that love and forgiveness are the cement which hold the family together. When a crowd confronts a difficulty, they fragment. When a family encounters difficulty, it come together through the bonds of love and the experience of forgiveness.

Isolation and loneliness are the experience of many in our world today, as community life is so often replaced with individualism. This is particularly true of all those who leave their native countries to find a better life in other parts of the world. And the Mayo family is no exception to this. Torn between two shores, they can readily identify with the sentiments of the song which says "LA's fine, the sun shines most the time but it ain't home; New York's home but it ain't mine no more". So whether you find yourself as a Mayo native in the sunshine of L.A or a native of another country staring at the rain in Mayo, you need to feel the bonds of family. And for all of us, Mayo by birth or by adoption, the green and red colours, the as yet out of focus image of Sam Maguire being paraded through the streets of Ballina, Castlebar and Westport, Croagh Patrick and the River Moy all combine to assure us that no matter where we live we are all part and parcel of the Mayo family. And what keeps us together, as Pope Francis said, is the beauty of being together, of supporting each other along the journey of life. This is what changes us from being individuals lost in a crowd to being members of a county family.

Being a family means that in the long run, no matter what difficulties arise, we can turn to each other and find support when we need it. The feeling of being able to do this transforms isolation into security and despair into hope. And despite all the advances in our modern world, many still feel isolated and equally many are touched by despair. I would like to think that the message that goes out from this Mayo Day 2018 is that we can always turn to one another, that there is a light in the darkness. During the Presidency of Mary Robinson the candle lighting in the window of Áras an Uachtaráin at Christmas time became well known worldwide. It was a symbol of the openness of that house and every house at that time of year. It made Mayo known for its welcome. And that welcome is captured in the three logos I mentioned; Mayo a county that is connected with its diaspora, that strengthens its communities, that cares for its people and is at heart a family.

Happy Mayo Day.