**Homily at Diocesan Jubilee Mass – St. Muredach’s Cathedral – June 7th, 2019**

This evening we mark a truly historic moment in the life of this diocese. Ten men celebrate a jubilee of ordination and one of them, Monsignor Gallagher, celebrates seventy years of service as a priest of the diocese. Insofar as I know, his is the longest service even given by a priest in this diocese.

The span of these years, from seventy to twenty five, is particularly significant in today’s world, where lifelong commitment is a value which has become increasingly undermined in the culture of our times. Indeed there are many voices which would say ‘this is impossible’.  But seventy seven or eight years ago, Monsignor Gallagher heard the call to follow Christ. He took it seriously and reflected on it for seven years in Maynooth. And for the past seventy years he has given single minded, dedicated service to the Church. In varying degrees, the other members of this jubilee year have had the same experience. For younger minds today, this must surely have the WOW-factor to it.

Faithful service, life -long commitment; these are not what many people are used to in the throw away culture of our time. However, the fact that this value may have receded into the background does not mean that it has become irrelevant. Indeed, it is more needed nowadays than ever before. This evening, as we celebrate the faithfulness of these men, we have an opportunity to think about the qualities which supported them in living out their commitment. This evening’s Gospel gives us a number of pointers.

Two pairs of brothers – Simon and Andrew, and James and John – are going about their daily tasks as fishermen.  In this demanding work, they had learned how to face difficulties, how to face the laws of nature. When the winds were adverse and waves shook their boats, they were forced to defy the elements to survive.  On some days, the catch of fish amply repaid their efforts, but on others, an entire night’s work was not sufficient to fill their nets, and they had to return to shore weary and disappointed. Much of life in the priesthood is like that.  As priests, each of us tries to live out our commitment to service. We engage in activities that we hope will prove enriching for the people we serve. We put out on a “sea” of possibilities in the hope of steering the right course, one that will satisfy our desire to serve Christ and his people.  Sometimes we enjoy a good catch, while at others, we need courage to keep our boat from being tossed by the waves, or we are frustrated at seeing our nets come up empty. But because, as St Paul said ‘our lives are hidden with Christ in God’ we have the strength we need to remain faithful.

In varying degrees, our jubilarians have lived out their priesthood in the turbulent and choppy waters in which the Church in Ireland has found itself over the past thirty years. There were times when the waves rose so high that the boat looked as if it would sink. At other times the threat of the unknown caused fear in many hearts and in a sense continues to do so. From the optimism of the heady years on the 1960’s, after the Second Vatican Council, to the erosion of hope and confidence of more recent years, our jubilarians and indeed all our priests have lived with the fear of the unknown. And yet they remained and remain steadfast in the face of it all. This evening we acknowledge their courage and we pay tribute to their steely determination to serve Christ, to whom they committed their lives on ordination day.

Pope Francis said recently; “Let us remember that the path of human maturity is the path itself of love that goes from receiving care to the ability to offer care, from receiving life to the ability to give life,” Our jubilarians have made that journey. They received care, inspiration and encouragement from their families to begin the journey and they continue to do so, thank God.  And I pay tribute this evening to the family members who have gathered with our jubilarians. You mean everything to them and to us. Having received care and support from you they then offered exceptional pastoral care to the people of this diocese over all these years.

As with every call, today’s Gospel speaks of an encounter.  Jesus walks by, sees those fishermen, and walks up to them.  The same thing happened when these men first heard the call to follow Christ. They may have been surprised by the encounter but from that moment they glimpsed the promise of a joy capable of bringing fulfilment to their lives and the lives of others. As on that day, by the sea of Galilee, when Jesus drew near to those fishermen, breaking through the challenges of routine fishing, he also made them a promise: “I will make you fishers of men” (Mk1:17).  The spirituality of the diocesan priest is the most neglected in the history of spiritual writing. Why? Because the diocesan priest is out there, serving his people. His focus, his spirituality is Christ in action in the circumstances in which he finds himself. And the faithfulness which sustains him is rooted in his continuing daily encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, in the Breviary and in a life of selfless dedication.

The call to faithfulness challenges the temptations that every Christian feels at one point or another: tiredness, jadedness, settling into a comfortable life, clinging to routine and even, perhaps, power. The cost of discipleship which our jubilarians have experienced has, however, strengthened rather than weakened them. And their model is the life of Christ, who loved to the point of death and sacrificed himself for our salvation.

This evening, therefore, as we salute these men and recognise their service, we highlight the value of faithfulness and we recognise that, with the support of God, our families and our friends this value is alive and well in our Church and in our society.

Let me end by quoting the words of Christ on being faithful in St Luke’s Gospel and address it to our jubilarians; ‘you are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials, and now I confer a kingdom on you, just as my father conferred one on me; you will eat and drink at my table in the kingdom’.