**St Muredach’s Cathedral, Ballina**

**October 10th, 2021**

**Mass of Chrism & Diocesan Jubilees**

**Words of welcome**

I welcome everyone to our Mass of Chrism and our Jubilee celebration this evening.

In particular, I welcome Fr Michael Flynn and Fr Sean Noone, who celebrate their Golden Jubilee of ordination. I welcome Fr Francis Judge, Fr Kevin Hegarty, Fr Gerry O’Donnell, Fr John Judge, and in his absence, Fr Eddie Rogan, who are celebrating the Ruby Anniversary of ordination. Fr Oliver McHugh and Fr Brendan McHale, celebrate the Golden Jubilee of their ordination but, unfortunately, cannot be with us this evening.

I congratulate our Jubilarians. I thank them for their years of faithful service and wish them well for the future.

I welcome all who have come here this evening for this Mass of Chrism and our Jubilee celebration. I thank you for the support given to these men and to all our priests. I assure you of the appreciation of this diocese and all who have benefited from their ministry.

Finally, I welcome the priests of the diocese who have come here this evening to celebrate the priesthood of our Jubilarians and this Mass of Chrism, in which we renew our commitment to priesthood and to service of the People of God in this diocese.

On this Jubilee Day, as we gather together in our communion with Christ and one another, we thank God for his goodness and we ask God’s pardon for our failures and faults.

**Homily**

Finally, after all these long months of lockdown and restrictions, we can gather to celebrate the Mass of Chrism 2021 and mark the jubilees of ordination of our priests. As we do so we remember those who died from Covid-19, especially our dear friend, Monsignor Paddy Gallagher. We acknowledge, with deep gratitude, all those who cared for those who contracted the illness. We thank and pay tribute especially to those in our own care centres here in Ballina, in Enniscrone and in Belmullet. And we thank all those who have ensured that this Cathedral and all our churches are safe places in which we can gather to pray and to worship.

And so we celebrate. We celebrate the fifty years of dedicated service given in this diocese by Fr Michael Flynn and Fr Sean Noone. The forty years given by Fr Francis Judge, Fr Kevin Hegarty, Fr Gerry O’Donnell, Fr Eddie Rogan and Fr John Judge. In particular, we mark the contribution made to the mission of the Church in foreign lands by Fr Ollie McHugh and Fr Brendan McHale. We congratulate them, thank them for their service and wish them well for the remainder of the journey of life. Recently, Pope Francis recalling the priestly ordination of some young French priests, reminded them that they had been anointed with the oil of joy and as such were to anoint others with that same oil. He said that only by remaining rooted in Christ can we experience a joy that moves us to win hearts and because of this he concluded; “Priestly joy is the source of your action as missionaries of your time”.

And yet, let us be honest and acknowledge that the past fifty years have not been a period of unrestrained joy for either priests or people in our country, or indeed in many countries of the world. For most of us, our joy is real and is deep seated but it is tempered each day by the circumstances in which we find ourselves. And we now find ourselves in the situation familiar to Jesus in to-day’s Gospel, where, to quote St John, ‘After hearing it, many of his followers said; ‘this is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it. After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him’. Sentiments so familiar to us nowadays, when so many find our Church and our ministry unacceptable and have ceased to walk with us. And the question posed by Jesus then faces us also today; What about you? Do you want to go away too? And Peter’s answer is ours also. Lord, to whom shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life’. His response is, therefore, the real source of our deep joy in priesthood.

When talking to them, the Pope urged the young French priests to build a Church that is entirely at the service of a world that is more fraternal and in solidarity. He reminded them ‘that they should not be afraid to dare, to risk and to go forward, assured that with Christ they can be apostles of joy and be grateful for serving their brothers and sisters and the Church.’ In these dark days for the Church in France I hope that they keep his words in mind.

Twenty-one years ago, when Pope St John Paul II launched the new millennium, he did so with the words ‘Put out into the deep.’ His words are as important now as then and equally challenging. Put out into the deep. And this is where the words of his successor are so important for us; ‘do not be afraid to dare, to risk and to go forward’ As priests, therefore, we are heartened by the assurance that with Christ, we can still be apostles of joy in this different, indifferent, challenging world in which many of our people find the language of the Gospel intolerable and no longer walk with us.

The Pope, when speaking to those young French priests also said; ‘Priesthood isolated from the People of God, is neither a Catholic priesthood nor a Christian one’. The challenge that faces us nowadays, against the background of the many who no longer walk with us, is to do everything we can to ensure that as priests we do not become separated from the people of God. And the only way in which we can ensure that isolation does not arise is to walk with our people in the new ways proposed by the synodal pathway. The Pope said pastors should be “people capable of living, of laughing and crying with your people, in a word, of communicating with them”. And he also said; “Strip yourselves of your pre-constituted ideas, your dreams of greatness, your self-assertion, in order to put God and people at the centre of your daily concerns,” Let’s be honest. While dreams of greatness may not be part of our thinking today, there is a danger that traces of self-assertion on all sides may still linger on and this self-assertion may well pose a threat to the success of the synodal pathway that we hope will lead to a new, reformed Church, fit for purpose in the secular age in which we now live.

Next Sunday, in union with dioceses all over the world, we will launch our diocesan synodal initiative. This will test our determination to put the exhortations of Pope Francis and of St Paul to the people of Ephesus in this evening’s second Reading, into action. And the vision they present is common to all of us, the baptised; to lead a life worthy of our vocation, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience, doing all we can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds us together. Remembering that there is one Body, one Spirit, just as we are all called into the one hope when we were called in baptism. Working together, priests and people, making a unity in the work of service, building up the Body of Christ, until we become the perfect Church, fully mature with the fullness of Christ.

The goal of the synodal pathway is all of us together, the baptised, fully mature with the fullness of Christ. When that goal is reached, intolerable language will no longer be a concern, as all the baptised will walk together towards Emmaus.