**Homily - Day for Life 2021 – Killala Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock**

The Day for Life is celebrated each year by the Catholic Church in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. It is a day dedicated to raising awareness of the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition. This year’s Day for Life is celebrated in Ireland today and the theme of it is 'The Good Samaritan: A Model of Compassion'.

The parable of the Good Samaritan isn't just a story to reflect on, but it is a concrete choice we are asked to make in deciding how we live and how we treat those around us. The Good Samaritan shows us a lifestyle, the centre of which is not ourselves, but others, with all their difficulties and challenges. The parable may appear clear and straightforward, yet it also touches the interior struggle that each of us experiences, as we gradually come to know ourselves through our relationships with others. Pope Francis, in focusing on this interior struggle, stresses that the primary challenges we face in public life today are spiritual, not theoretical or technocratic. Jesus, Pope Francis writes, “asks us not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbour, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all” (Fratelli Tutti. No. 80).

Compassion for the Christian is, therefore, a way of life, an attitude, something that is constantly within us and which expresses itself in everything we say, do and think. And so, for example, many people today, especially the young and the elderly, are looking for someone to listen to them. Someone willing to grant them time, to listen to their dramas and difficulties. Compassion will tell us to stop, to listen and, very often, to learn. Pope Francis calls this the “apostolate of the ear,” and it is important. Very important.

In marriage, compassion will bring us to the realisation that no matter what the difficulties and challenges we face; on an important day, perhaps long ago, we stood beside someone and said to them, ‘I will look after you for the rest of your life.’ And ‘looking after you’ simply means caring for you with love, tenderness and compassion, no matter what happens.

When we reflect of old age and the passing of time, compassion means staying with the vulnerable and all those who fear being abandoned in their final years and illness. The Good Samaritan, as the Irish bishops note in their Pastoral, ‘ is the one who ‘crosses over’, who ‘binds up wounds’ and who most important of all ‘stays with’ the person for as long as is required. And this ‘staying with’ for us Christians lasts until the Good Lord, and not any one of us, calls them home at last.

For me, the Church of the future has to be a Church of Compassion, if we are to rediscover the wish of the Lord and ensure that his message, his Gospel, and indeed Christianity itself, is part of our future. You don’t need me to remind you of the years when our Church lacked compassion and inflicted so much lasting pain, not only on the lives of individuals but on the life of the Church itself. On this Day for Life,  we pledge our support for a more compassionate Church in the future. As we do so, we acknowledge and ask pardon for the sins of the past.

Compassion will never be without its challenges. Filled with fear, disappointment and the dread of the unknown, the news of the special needs nature of an unborn child will always challenge our Christian spirit to be Christian, when, perhaps, our natural instinct would be to end that life. The sight of one we love at an advanced stage of dementia or cancer or facing years of an incurable disease may tempt us to end their pain and suffering and yet, true compassion will ensure that we care for them and ease their suffering until the Good Lord, who never abandons them, calls them to himself.

The compassion of the Good Samaritan goes beyond the minimum. He went above and beyond just rescuing the man; he cared for him and paid for all the expenses involved in curing him.

As Christians, we are also called to go above and beyond what a world which does not share our faith may promote or think. Our compassion is simply what that word truly means, to suffer with. It is based on and is an expression of our faith. Faith brings the world of God into our everyday lives and colours every decision we make. It inspires us the see the bigger picture, that we come from God, return to God and live our lives under his care and compassion, even when we sometimes can’t see this.

The fragility of life and the reality of death have been brought into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the island of Ireland alone, more than 8,000 people have died with Covid-19. Each of these lives is precious and every life matters. With a most amazing spirit of solidarity, the energies of our society - in hospitals, test centres, vaccination clinics, schools, churches, supermarkets and in so many other places - have been directed towards protecting those who were most vulnerable to disease. We have begun to see the fruits of those efforts and the culture of life that they represent. It seems such an irony that after this mammoth task of saving lives and vaccinating our people, a Bill designed to end life by assisted suicide should be before the Dáil. As the restrictions on our lives begin to ease, on this Day for Life 2021, let us once again acknowledge and continue the commitment we have shown to the protection of life.