

At this Chrism Mass the sacred oils of Catechumens and of the Sick are blessed and the Oil of Chrism is consecrated. These will be used in administering the sacraments, the presence of Christ, to heal and to make holy. This evening our priests renew their vows and 64 lay leaders will be commissioned.

Over the last year I have travelled throughout the Diocese of Killala, meeting with priests and with representatives of Parish Pastoral Councils. We have 'Conversations in the Spirit', an ancient, but also a new and evolving way of encounter. We are exploring the future of our two dioceses, Killala and Tuam, being united as one.

In going around I have certainly sensed gratitude among the people; in particular gratitude for the priests of this diocese. You have said to me very clearly, 'this is our priest', 'our man' and, at times, you have also said, 'don't move him'. Certainly, there is real affection, a genuine sense of identity with, and support for, the priest in the parish. There is heartfelt gratitude for the priests' work and their being with you. As we renew our priestly vows today, I convey to our priests, that gratitude, that sense of belonging and of identity with you, so clearly expressed by your parishioners. Thank you for your effective and generous work for Jesus and his mission and his people in this Diocese of Killala.

In going around I also hear concerns. Concerns that our young people are missing from Church, and not just young but many right into middle age. They are missing out on that hope, that sense of the beauty of life, and the sense of 'being at home in the world and ready for the next', that only Christ can give. That is a concern; that is a loss. There are worries about the declining number of priests and few vocations to replace them. You have said very clearly to me you want priests; I have heard that. Don't forget the priests of the future are now in your homes, in your families, on your local football teams, in colleges, in apprenticeships and in employment. They are among us.

I also hear and see, lots of hope for the future. There are the many people who believe in God, who have deep devotion, who pray, who are happy and enthusiastic to be Catholic. Those who love Jesus and the Mass, those who receive the sacraments, those who instinctively assist

others. There are many who adhere faithfully to the Catholic teaching and tradition. There is faith, deep faith, among many, many people in this diocese. There is also faith that does not find expression through our usual practices, but it is faith and it is there. There is hope in the sense of trusting that God always looks out for us, he is always with us, because we are his. There is goodness, and care, neighbourliness and welcome, as there should be for any Christian. In this jubilee year of hope, there is certainly hope in this diocese.

One of those green shoots of hope, or maybe 64 green shoots, are the 64 recent graduates in Lay Leadership at the Newman Centre, Ballina, who will be commissioned at this Chrism Mass to work in our parishes. Your commitment, your generosity and your enthusiasm are exemplary. Leadership does not depend just on a course, but on faith, on hope, and above all on a relationship with Jesus Christ. That is what makes the disciple; Jesus, he makes and moulds the disciple.

At this year's Confirmations, I have been emphasising the anointing with Chrism. We are chosen by God, we are, each one of us special to Him, we are anointed for mission at Baptism and again at Confirmation, and we are sent out strengthened and enthused to do that particular work which God has entrusted to us. As anointed, we become people of 'The Good News'. We should not keep that good news to ourselves. It is meant to be spread, to be contagious, to be shared.

In this diocese, the work of lay leadership in parish will be shared by these chosen women and men, to work with and alongside the priest, the parish pastoral councils and others, for the mission of the local and universal Church. That mission is, and always will be, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. It can be nothing less. So, today in this Diocese of Killala, a carefully researched and long prepared initiative comes to fruition with the commissioning of lay leaders. As you listen to their undertaking, to their promises, you will see this is a very practical, increasingly necessary, and very much a baptismal calling of the faithful, to take responsibility, in particular circumstances, for the mission of the Church, for the mission of spreading that good news of Jesus.

The priest wears the alb, the long white baptismal garment, when he administers the sacraments. The stole and chasuble are signs that he is a priest, but the alb is a sign that he is, first of all, a Christian, he is baptised. The white robe that our lay leaders wear is a reminder of the baptismal garment. We all were baptised when we were tiny, tiny little Christians but also very, very important little Christians. Baptism was the start of a faith journey, sustained, encouraged, challenged by those whose own faith called them to support us.

In interpreting the signs of the times, the voice of the faithful and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Diocese of Killala said 'yes' we have to do something, 'yes' we have to listen and plan. The diocese did something in putting recruitment and training in place, then graduation and now commissioning. The next stage is implementation of these initiatives in the various parishes. I express gratitude to those who brought this key project to fruition, who facilitated this pastoral initiative with wide and deep learning, and all those who generously and enthusiastically embraced lay leadership. I mention just one, among the many, and that is Bishop John Fleming. I thank him for his initiatives, his foresight and his great wisdom in guiding this historic project.

This initiative of co-leadership is fully within the hopes and programme of the Second Vatican Council. It is fully within the synodal, listening, hope filled and joyful and living community that is the Church, envisioned by Pope Francis.

In this jubilee year of hope, as we progress through the age old and moving rituals of renewing priestly vows, and blessing and consecrating the sacred oils, there is a new element, 'lay leadership'. It is about co-leadership, assisting our parishes, our people and our priests to look to the future with great hope. The mission, entrusted to us, the baptised, is to help bring the good news of Jesus, in new and engaging ways, into many lives. May that mission continue and flourish in this diocese of Killala.