

Archdiocese of Birmingham



HOMILY

Preached by

**THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM**

at the

MASS FOR YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

SATURDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2014

ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL, BIRMINGHAM

Leave your country, your family and your father's house for the land I will show you.

During this year dedicated to the Consecrated Life there will be many events, local and national, recognising the vital contribution made by Religious men and women and by the Order of Consecrated Virgins to the Church's witness and service in England and Wales. Some of us will participate in international celebrations, perhaps organised by our Congregational leadership, focussing on the Religious vocation as it is today and reflecting on the ways that it is evolving to meet future needs and opportunities.

I am grateful that today's Mass and the gathering organised by the diocesan Vicars for Religious bring us together in the Cathedral as the family of the local Church. In this way we are able to see more clearly the rich diversity of the members of the Body of Christ and the different charisms with which the Holy Spirit has equipped the Church to fulfil her mission across the West Midlands.

When I reflect on the story of this Archdiocese I am drawn into the extraordinary lives of remarkable Religious men and women whose legacy we share today. The Passionist Blessed Dominic Barberi and the Oratorian Blessed John Henry Newman are figures of national and international significance whose lives so fruitfully intertwined. They have shaped the Church's mission and set us on a trajectory that reaches outwards in service of others and in commitment to dialogue.

Mother Margaret Halloran of the Dominicans and Mother Genevieve Dupuis of the Sisters of Charity of St Paul the Apostle were driven by the Holy Spirit to live lives of radical discipleship that moved and inspired others to leave their homes and countries

of origin and come to the industrial heart of this country to serve the needs of the poor through healthcare and education.

Bishop William Bernard Ullathorne, the first Catholic Bishop of Birmingham brought the Benedictine pattern of prayer into his episcopal ministry. His own experience of Religious life determined that he should enable other expressions of the Consecrated Life to flourish in this Archdiocese from its earliest days. The foundations of the Catholic communities in Stoke on Trent, Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Coventry, Oxford and Worcester were laid by Religious men and women who were led there by the Holy Spirit. Today we also give thanks for the expression of Religious life among our fellow Christians and in particular within the Church of England. I am grateful for the presence and fellowship of our Anglican brothers and sisters whose communities have generously served others, often in the most challenging of local situations, alleviating deprivation and need and deserving their place in the affections of the local people. I welcome them together with Canon Mark Pryce today.

I realise that it is not your wish simply to acknowledge where the achievements of our predecessors have brought us. This Year of Consecrated Life encourages us to look forward and to recognise the opportunities and challenges that lie before us. I am aware of some of the new directions that Religious life is taking and I welcome its ability to cross new thresholds to touch the lives of those beyond the reach of other ministries within the Church.

There is an important freedom and flexibility open to Religious that makes it possible to minister at the margins, to have time for those who might otherwise be forgotten or overlooked. Canon Pryce has mentioned a tradition in some Sikh communities which is akin to Religious life, where certain members of the Gurdwara community are known as *bahingam*, the Sanskrit for *birds*, expressing beautifully the notion of consecrated life being unattached. Dear brother and sisters you are often able to show the love of Christ to those who have fallen between the gaps because you have a different perspective that is vital to the mission of the Church.

Pope Francis, in announcing this special year, also set before you this challenge: *An authentic faith always involves a profound desire to change the world. Here is the question we must ask ourselves: do we also have great vision and impetus? Are we also daring? Do our dreams fly high? Does zeal consume us?*

I am grateful that your lay colleagues and friends have also learned to share the charisms of your Religious Congregations in such a way that your mission has been deeply enriched and your priorities have been re-shaped for the future.

In an increasingly important partnership between Religious and lay-faithful it will always be part of the mission of our local Church to try to understand the world that we seek to serve, and to reach out making connections with other people of goodwill that also deepen our faith. May the Religious and the Consecrated Virgins of our Archdiocese always help others to find the *pearl of great price* and *the treasure hidden in a field* so that God's Kingdom may flourish among us.