

**MASS FOR RELIGIOUS: ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL
6 FEBRUARY 2021**

Keep doing good works and sharing your resources, for these are sacrifices that please God.

Sadly, this year it has not been possible to hold our usual annual gathering for the Religious communities to spend a day together here at St Chad's. The coronavirus has placed many restrictions on the way that we live and changed the pattern of our life of faith. It has also opened up new possibilities for reaching out to assist those in need and the Religious of the Archdiocese have often been at the forefront of these.

Throughout the last extraordinary year I know that you have continued to work and witness through the varied and complementary charisms that distinguish your different Religious Congregations. I am also mindful that we are joined today by those who live the consecrated life in the midst of their parish communities – and that you have given faithful and prayerful service to those in need of support and help.

This year's day for Religious falls on the feast of a Jesuit martyr, St Paul Miki. He gave his life as a witness to his faith in Christ, alongside his companion martyrs, on 5 February 1597 in Nagasaki, Japan. His story reminds us of the evangelical imperative to take the Good News to all parts of the world. We see how that missionary impulse found fruitful expression through the charism of the Society of Jesus.

We are blessed to have several missionary congregations in the Archdiocese – men and women who have served the Church in Africa, Asia and South America. You have brought a rich experience of the universal Church helped to shape our own missionary awareness. You have shared your particular charisms with other lay faithful who are associated with your work.

I am mindful, for example, of the work of the lay Columban Missionaries here in the heart of Birmingham. I know that other ways of Religious life have inspired and been the founding ethos of many evangelical and charitable initiatives across the Archdiocese. It must be a source of great joy to many of our Religious Congregations to see educational projects and social outreach initiatives flourish in the partnerships that you have founded.

These and many other examples reveal the work of the Holy Spirit through Religious life. They demonstrate the priorities of the Gospel and reflect the message that we have received in today's Scripture readings: *Keep doing good works and sharing your resources, for these are sacrifices that please God.* Making such sacrifices also makes Religious aware and appreciative of the sacrifices that other people – individuals and families - are making every day.

In this Mass we focus today on the particular gift that consecrated lives bring into the local church. It is a precious gift that witnesses to the Kingdom of God in our midst through the vows which have shaped your way of life. Religious life offers a welcome witness to the presence of the Lord wherever his mercy is needed and whenever people call upon him for help.

I am grateful that Religious communities small and large are present in every part of our Archdiocese offering their witness first of all as places of prayer. Many of your communities love to welcome local parishioners together with other neighbours to come into your homes and to join you in prayer. The current coronavirus pandemic has made this impossible for the time being.

Religious life is not static. You are used to moving from place to place to take up a new apostolate. The Holy Spirit equips you to use the gift of discernment to understand where you are called to serve and how. Different charisms have enabled your Congregations to respond to people's needs in education and healthcare, in the alleviation of poverty and want, in the cause of justice and peace, in catechesis and spiritual direction and by offering oases of stillness and prayer as a retreat from the busyness of the world.

The structures and patterns of Religious life also enable you to discern where and how you are called to serve. I am grateful for the fruitful co-operation between the local church and Religious that helps parishes and communities to know the love of God through your many different charisms and apostolates.

Today we recognise our jubilarians and thank the Lord for their dedicated and sustained work and witness over so many years. Please join me in congratulating and praying for the following jubilarians for each of whom a Papal Blessing has been acquired.

St Mark's Gospel invites us to *come away to some lonely place...and rest for a while* with the Lord, so as to reflect on the vocation to Religious life and ask him to renew its vision and energy within you for the good of others. Dear friends, as you renew your commitment today may your words be a reminder of the love of Christ that is to shine from within your lives. May the reflection of Christ's goodness within those you serve hold you close to him throughout all the years to come.