

**CIVIC MASS HOMILY
26 NOVEMBER 2023**

In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.

I'm very conscious of the privilege of celebrating the Civic Mass each year here at St Chad's. It is an important moment in the calendar of the Cathedral and an occasion to which we look forward as our opportunity to pray for God's blessing upon this great city. In doing so the Catholic community finds itself at home alongside the other Christian churches and the other world faith communities that help to form the character of Birmingham.

I am grateful that each year our Cathedral hosts this occasion when its regular worshippers can welcome and be at one with so many of those who represent the civic, judicial, diplomatic, academic and commercial life of the city. People of faith are fully engaged in every dimension of the city's life – and we belong to faith communities – Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Christian – for whom the city of Birmingham is both our home and the setting in which we enjoy the freedom to worship God and witness to the complementary values and virtues of our different beliefs.

I am conscious that the judiciary, together with our politicians and diplomats, are entrusted with the task of safeguarding and promoting the civil liberties that we enjoy. This represents one of the cherished privileges of life in the United Kingdom and of being a citizen in Birmingham. This year's Coronation of King Charles and Queen Camilla helped us remember that the institutions that enshrine and guarantee our freedoms and that uphold the dignity of the human person have their roots in our Christian heritage.

The followers of Jesus Christ today have an obligation to serve our brothers and sisters of all faiths and of none – this is in our religious DNA. It is deeply embedded in the teaching of Our Lord and today's reading from the Gospel of St Matthew illustrates this eloquently.

This last Sunday before Advent – the season when we prepare for Christmas and for the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time – this Sunday is observed by Catholics as the Feast of Christ the King. The Church asks us to reflect on the coming of God’s Kingdom at the end of time and Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats sets before us very clearly the standard by which we shall be judged by Christ the King. We shall be judged by the rule of love, expressed in our concern for others’ needs.

St Matthew’s Gospel refers to Jesus as the *Son of Man*, emphasising the solidarity between Jesus Christ and the whole of humanity. This is why he says: *In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.* The way that we respond to and treat other people is not a judgment upon **them** - it is much more a reflection of who **we** are and on the city that we have built and shaped.

In Our Lord’s parable the people who have responded the most generously fail to recognise themselves. *Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?* We know from experience that those who do so much good in our society are often very modest about their achievements – and it is inspiring and gratifying when our civic leaders and institutions are able to recognise these good samaritans. I am sure there are many moments in court when our legal processes reveal the goodness of human nature as well as exposing its weaknesses.

With all our social and technological progress, there are features of the life of every great city that Jesus would still recognise in the world today. It is sinful that in so many countries people go hungry and thirsty, that they have to flee from their homes as political refugees, because of the horrors of warfare or to search for a better future as economic migrants. Our city has continued to offer a home to so many who have come through great tragedies and survived great disappointments.

And yet we still see the homeless sleeping in doorways, coming to the street kitchens or food banks and needing the winter night-shelters. It is a real challenge, not just to our politicians and economists, but to every person of faith. For churches and faith communities it begs the question *how do we use the properties and resources entrusted to us for the good of others?*

Among our most precious resources are the young people who give such a powerful witness to their own faith in Christ through prayer and service. Today is observed by the Catholic Church as National Youth Sunday - an opportunity to recognise young people as a gift in the Church and to celebrate and affirm the contribution they make to the Church's mission.

I would therefore like to welcome Ellen Turner to share a few words with us today. Ellen is a parishioner of Quinton Parish, now in her final year studying politics at the University of Warwick and serving as a part-time chaplain at Bishop Challoner Catholic College in King's Heath. I also welcome Yemisi Wisoba from our diocesan youth service, the Kenelm Youth Trust, for whose work a second collection will be taken today.

WELCOME

Welcome to this Civic Mass on the Feast of Christ the King. A warm welcome from Mgr Timothy, the Dean of St Chad's Cathedral, from the trustees of the Archdiocese and from myself to all our guests and visitors and to those who are united with us in prayer through the live-streaming of this Mass.

I welcome our many civic guests, those representing the cultural, political, religious and academic life of our city, and those frontline workers and service providers on whose work and support so many of us depend.

I welcome to the Cathedral:

- His Majesty's Vice Lord Lieutenant, Mrs Louise Bennett and the Lord Lieutenant's Cadet, Corporal Sean Cronin**
- The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Cllr Chaman Lal and the Lady Mayoress, Mrs Vidya Wati**
- The High Sheriff of the West Midlands, Mr Wade Lyn and Ms Monica Coke with Cadets from the West Midlands Police**
- Mr Liam Byrne MP**
- The Bishop of Aston, Bishop Anne Hollinghurst, Dean Matt Thomson from St Philip's Cathedral and our neighbours Major Adrian and Captain Clare Allman with Major Samuel Edgar from the Salvation Army – to all of whom I am very grateful for the ecumenical friendships that inspire and sustain our work together, alongside the members of the Birmingham Faith Leaders Group.**
- Chief Superintendent Richard North representing the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police and Mr Simon Foster the West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner.**
- His Majesty's High Court Judges & Circuit Judges (both serving and retired)**

- **Judge Mark Aspinall and magistrates representing the Birmingham & Solihull Magistrates**
- **Professor Peter Childs, the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Birmingham Newman University**
- **Mr Keith Stokes-Smith, the President of the Consular Association and other Honorary Consuls**
- **Regimental Sergeant Major Gosney from the 26th Royal Artillery Gunners and Commander Hogan from HMS Forward**
- **Ms Gillian Guy, the Chairman of Warwickshire & Birmingham Royal British Legion**

Finally, I welcome representatives from organisations and societies within the Archdiocese and all our Cathedral parishioners.

And now - please stand as we begin this Civic Mass by asking for the gift of God's pardon and peace in the world through the merciful love of Christ the King.

ENVOI

Thank you once again for joining us here in the Cathedral or from your home for this morning's Civic Mass.

My thanks to Mgr Timothy, to the Cathedral staff and volunteers, to the altar-servers, the Papal Knights and Dames and to our Master of Ceremonies Fr Dominic for their support in today's celebration.

I also thank Professor David Saint and the Cathedral Choir for their wonderful contribution to our Cathedral worship today and throughout the year.

May you all be blessed with a joyful Advent and a peaceful Christmas in the weeks to come.