

HOMILY – MOST REV. GEORGE STACK

SR. MARY TERESA

100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

LLANTARNAM ABBEY

27 MAY 2014

In many ways, the Western World came brutally in to the modern age in the year 1914. To have been born in that year, and to celebrate a hundredth birthday this year, is to have witnessed two World Wars, the Third Home Rule Bill for Ireland, the Great Depression, the 1944 Education Act, the Second Vatican Council, and the technological revolution all of which have brought us to this day. For a religious woman who steps into this maelstrom of human history, and has exercised her ministry throughout the last century, the motto of the 16th century Carthusian martyrs must surely always be the reference point. “Crux dum volvitur orbis” – The cross stands while the world turns.

Sr. Mary Teresa has been part of that turning world during her long and fulfilled life. Teaching generations of pupils at St. Joseph’s and other schools here in the Diocese of Cardiff and serving in the parish she continues to be “At the still point of a turning world” (T.S. Eliot: Four Quartets) for all who know her. At the beginning of Mass the cross of religious profession was brought to the altar as a reminder of many things. We have to embrace the cross. We have to grow into the cross and through the cross thereby learning the meaning of the

cross in each circumstance of our lives. "It is only then," said Cardinal Basil Hume, "will the cross yield up its meaning".

Her patron is the great St. Theresa of Avila. She was the great Spanish 16<sup>th</sup> century mystic who dissected the spiritual life not just in words but in action too. She suffered the agony and ecstasy of embracing the cross. She knew her own weakness and sinfulness yet had a profound understanding of the forgiveness and love of God. She reformed the Carmelite order in Avila, and attracted many new sisters to a stricter following of the rule of life. She used to say, *"Prayer is an act of love. Words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love"*. That is the significance of the words of Jesus in today's gospel: *"I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father"*.

The book of the rule of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy was brought to the altar at the beginning of Mass too. As a dedicated teacher and religious, Sr. Mary Teresa knows that text books are not the last word of the teaching trade, but the first word, to be brought to life by the insight, energy, wisdom and dedication of the teacher. The same is true of the Rule of Life. Not the last word, the final word, the restricting word. It is the first word, the springboard into a living communication with God which St. Teresa of Avila experienced and shared.

It was St. Teresa who prayed:

Christ has no body on earth but yours.

No hands, no feet.

Yours are the eyes with which he looks

With compassion on this world.

The presence of so many people here today for this celebration is a testimony to the fact that they have experienced the compassionate word, the healing touch, the careful guidance of our own Sr. Teresa. They will make their own the words of St. Paul in today's second reading "I am continually giving thanks to God about you, for the grace of God which you have been given in Christ Jesus". As we celebrate her dedication and commitment on her journey of life and faith, she continues to be an example to us as we make our pilgrim way. Sr. Maria Goretti will give an account of that life during lunch. But I am sure if Sr. Teresa were giving this homily instead of me, she would echo the words of the poet T. S. Eliot when he said:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.