

HOMILY PREACHED AT VESPERS IN HEREFORD CATHEDRAL

FOR THE FEAST OF ST. THOMAS CANTALUPE, BISHOP OF HEREFORD

1ST OCTOBER 2014 - ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

Earlier this year, the excavations of the foundations of the Blackfriars Monastery in Bute Park were completed, directly opposite where I live in Cardiff. The Dominican Priory had been founded there in 1224, barely eight years after St. Dominic established the Order of Preachers in the area around Toulouse. His successor as Fifth Master of the Dominicans was one Blessed Hubert of Romans. In the year 1260 Hubert sent an angry letter to his Dominican teacher, St. Albert the Great, who had just been appointed Bishop of Regensburg. You will remember the University of Regensburg was made famous in our own time by Pope Benedict XVI and his quotation about Islam. The letter said:

“I would rather you were dead than a Bishop why ruin your reputation, and that of the Order, by letting yourself be taken away from poverty and preaching? However troublesome you find the brethren, do not imagine things will be better when you have the clergy and secular powers to deal with... Better to lie in a coffin than to sit in a Bishop’s Chair”.

Those words might resonate with the 105th Bishop of Hereford as he approaches the 22nd of November! They would certainly have resonated with Bishop Thomas Cantalupe of Hereford. The Roman Martyrology speaks about his many qualities as a Bishop, not least that he was zealous in reforming the clergy, both secular and religious! It seems as though the clergy, secular and religious, are always in need of reforming!! So the clergy of Hereford may not have been too unhappy that Thomas was excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in a dispute about jurisdiction and died in 1282 at Orvieto on his way back from pleading his cause with Pope Martin IV in Rome.

Thomas was vindicated, as we say, in the heavenly courts when he was canonised by Pope John XXII in 1320. Pope John wasn't without his own problems, being an Avignon Pope. But he recognised a good saint when he saw one. It was he who canonised the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas. He was also credited with writing the prayer called Anima Christi which is still one of the "top ten" Catholic hymns "Soul of my Saviour, Sanctify my breast".

Why do I give that magical mystery tour of medieval history and the somewhat turbulent episcopate of St. Thomas Cantalupe? Simply because he was called to exercise the threefold office of Bishop: to sanctify, to teach and to rule. And none of these things could he do alone. The extract we listened to from Paul's letter to the Romans teases out the implications of episcopal authority, enabling and empowering individual gifts in the church to be developed and flourish, whilst reminding even the most gifted among us that the charisms of prophecy, teaching, administration, preaching, charity and works of mercy only reach their full potential when put at the service of the whole community, for the greater good, and not just for our own self fulfilment.

How to balance the different gifts, and measure them against priorities and find the resources to *"bring forth treasures both new and old"* remains a challenge to Bishops, Deans and Chapters down to our own time. Although Hereford Cathedral was never a Monastic Foundation, the rule of St. Benedict on leadership in the monastery is as valid in the Church and Society at large as it is for the Abbot, the Dean and the Bishop. Benedict writes in chapter 64: *"The Abbot must ensure that the strong must always have something to strive for, whilst the weak must not be crushed"*.

The lesson, of course, is that no one of us is completely strong and no individual person is wholly weak. Strength and weakness compete in the life of each of us. The task any community, as Paul indicates, is to harmonise the strengths and weaknesses of each one or the good of the whole body. Paul goes further in his advice to us tonight. Do not let your love be a pretence.

Have a profound respect for each other. Work for the Lord with untiring effort, and with great earnestness of spirit. Often easier said than done!