

**HOMILY AT THE ANNUAL MASS
FOR CATHOLIC TEACHERS
IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF
ST. DAVID'S SIXTH FORM COLLEGE
17 SEPTEMBER 2015
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK**

On the final page of the Order of Service for this evening's Mass you will find the hymn 'All Creatures of our God and King'. It is taken from 'The Canticle of the Sun' by St. Francis of Assisi. Tradition has it that it was written by Francis in 1224 whilst he was recovering from an illness. He died two years later in 1226. The Wikipedia article on '*The Canticle of the Sun*', says that the Canticle is believed to be one of the first works of literature in the Italian language. I had better not mention the great poetry of Dante Allighieri!

When I was training to be a priest many years ago, I was taught by a very erudite Franciscan Friar named Fr Eric Doyle. Speaking of the Canticle he said: *"Francis did not physically 'write' the Canticle because of his blindness from an eye disease. He dictated it, and he did this by looking at Nature through the eyes of the mind. Though physically blind, he was able to see more clearly than ever with the inner ear of his mind. With unparalleled clarity he perceived the basic unit of all creation and his in place within it. His unqualified love of all creatures had grown into unity within his own heart. He was so open to reality that it found a place to be at home in his heart and he was at home everywhere and anywhere. He was a centre of communion with all creatures"*.

"He was a centre of communion with all creatures". What a beautiful sentence. He was therefore in communion with himself. One of the many descriptions, meanings, and purposes of education must surely be to learn how to be *"a centre of communion with all creatures"* – even with myself. It is

true, isn't it that we live in a very fragmented world. We divide things up, we categorise people, and we see things from a narrow perspective and make judgments about others, often based on prejudice and ignorance. I give just two examples of that fragmentation with regard to the young people entrusted to your care in order to be educated. The first is the world of virtual reality, the inability or perhaps the unwillingness, to distinguish between fact and fantasy. The digital world and the world of Information Technology full of contradictions, which often work against this "communion with all creatures", typified by Francis. This includes, of course, communion, integrity, wholeness, holiness within himself.

The second example of fragmentation, even of ex-communication, with which you will be familiar amongst your pupils, is the whole world of self-esteem, or should I say, lack of it. Judging myself, often negatively, against the impossible and imagined view that I think others have of me. The celebrity culture which sets forth an 'image' of a person paying little heed to the personal cost of trying to live up to that 'image' in the many different worlds occupied by every single person.

In 1979 Pope John Paul II, and later his successor Pope Benedict spoke of the human ecology. That delicate balance of body, mind and spirit within the human person. In another place Pope John Paul said "*They try to understand me from the outside in. I can only be understood from the inside out*". So often that is true as we judge by appearances, trying to make sense of a person (even ourselves, from the outside – in. Each one of us can only really be understood from the inside – out.)

You will see the theme of the Mass is taken from the Encyclical letter of Pope Francis '*Laudato Si'* – Praised be to you O Lord. These are the words of the Canticle of Creation by St. Francis's. Pope Francis continually makes the point that our care for creation, our responsibility for ecology, our response to the call for justice from the poor, doesn't come from outside in. It has to come

from inside out. I am always a bit nervous when I read “Best Results Ever” hanging outside the school gates at this time of year as though the school was a sort of educational supermarket. Come to Asda rather than Tesco and certainly not Lidl or Aldi. Of course our pupils have to acquire academic qualifications, of course they must find the right college or university course and get a good job. But the challenge of a Catholic school is to ensure this isn’t just about me, what I want, what I deserve, what I must have. The other side of that “*communion with every creature*” is that I am called to give of myself for the glory of God and for the well being of other people and of His creation. There is so much in the writings and teaching and lives of the saints that speak to us and our pupils of these deep truths. The prayer of John Henry Newman gives just one way of exploring these truths:

God knows me and calls me by name.

God has created me to do some definite service;

He has committed some work to me

Which he has not committed to another.

Somehow I am necessary for His purpose.

I have a part in this great work.

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection

Between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good.

I shall do His work

I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth

In my own place, while not intending it,

If I do by keep His commandments

And serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him.

Whatever, wherever I am,

I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him.

In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be

Necessary causes of some great end

Which is quite beyond us.

He does nothing in vain. He may prolong my life.

He may shorten it.

He knows what he is about.

He may take away my friends.

He may throw me among strangers.

He may make me feel desolate,

Make my spirits sink, hide the future from me.

Still he knows what he is about.

Let me be Thy blind instrument.

I ask not to see. I ask not to know.

I ask simply to be used.