

**MASS OF THANKSGIVING
FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE
ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF
AND THE PROVINCE OF WALES
AT ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, CARDIFF
20 JUNE 2016
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK**

Four years ago the BBC news website posted a photograph of a magnificent and imposing tomb in Cathays cemetery here in Cardiff. It was described as 'a monument to a once notable, but now forgotten, Catholic bishop who had championed the cause of Catholic education in the 19th century'. The news story went on to say that there was no one left to care for the grave, that there was grass growing through the cracks in the masonry and the Latin inscription had become illegible. The grave is that of Bishop John Cuthbert Hedley, Bishop of Newport, who was the architect of the new Archdiocese of Cardiff and Province of Wales. Sadly, he died in 1915, a year before the Diocese came into being.

Hedley was originally a Benedictine monk of Ampleforth Abbey. He was described as "*The leading intellectual among the Catholic bishops at the turn of the century, and the first of them to take the modern world seriously*". He was renowned for his care of the clergy, and determined to improve the quality of their preaching. He wrote critically: "*The emptiness, dryness and childishness of sermons are a*

great source of scandal to the flock". Unfortunately, his own preaching didn't rise to the standard of his academic prowess! His nickname among the clergy was "Deadly Hedley".

Bishop Brown, Bishop Hedley and Bishop James Romanus Bilsborrow, the first Archbishop of Cardiff, were all Benedictine monks. They personified the link between the Regular and Diocesan clergy, which sustained the Catholic Church through the darkest days of the recusant period, and the 18th century. That relationship was enhanced with the immigration arrival of the Irish Franciscans and other secular priests from Ireland to care for their flock in the early 19th century. Those bonds remain strong today.

At the beginning of the Year for Consecrated Life, Pope Francis wrote that the following attitudes should be the hallmarks of the religious and also the lay faithful of the church. *"Look at the past with gratitude". "Live the present with passion". "Embrace the future with hope"*.

Wales is rightly proud of its Christian history. The Roman martyrs of the 4th century: Julius, Aaron and Alban whose feast we keep today; the great Celtic saints of the 5th and 6th centuries: David and Dyfrig, Illtyd and Teilo, Elen and Non. The rich heritage of the medieval, abbeys and monasteries, Tintern and Margam, Ewenny and Llatnhony to name just a few. The heroic witness of our martyr saints, David Lewis, Philip Evans, John Kemble and Richard Gwyn amongst others. The heroes of the underground Church of the 17th and 18th centuries leading to the Second Spring of the 19th. All woven into the fabric of Catholicism in this country.

But just as Hedley was “the first Catholic bishop to take the modern world seriously” so, too, must we live the present with passion and compassion, not least in engaging with the public challenges and opportunities of secularism, pluralism, multi-culturalism and the refugee crisis. These are just some of the many issues that demand our attention. ‘The Cornerstone’ opposite, which is still shrouded in scaffolding, is just one sign that this Diocese is prepared to “engage with the world” through the new evangelisation whether that be in the university, the medical profession, politics or addressing the many social needs of our times.

All this in response to the encouragement of Pope Francis that we should “*embrace the future with hope*”. Like every Diocese, Cardiff has had to face the challenge of decreasing numbers of priests, the movement of population, the closure of obsolete buildings and other painful decisions. But hopefully, the prophetic words of Ezekiel will inspire us as they inspired a dispossessed people 600 years before the time of Jesus:

“As a shepherd looks after his flock when they have scattered, I will find my sheep. I will rescue them from wherever they have been scattered on dark, stormy days” (Ezk 34:12). We have plenty dark and stormy days in Wales!

The three questions addressed by Jesus in today’s gospel are directed to each of us who are members of “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people set apart*” (1Pet 2:9). He asks: “*Simon, son of*

John, do you love me?" (Jn 21:17). The threefold questioning probably reflects the three times Peter denied the Lord during his Passion.

"Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you" (Jn 21:17). Our love for Jesus is expressed in our care for all those who are missing, or who have strayed, or who have wondered, or who are weak in any way. That, of course, includes ourselves. Is not this what Pope Francis means when he says that the Church and its members should reach out to those "who are on the peripheries"? What else is he saying except inviting each of us to respond to the words of Jesus: "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17).

On 31st January 2012, the BBC reported that the newly renovated tomb of Bishop Hedley was re-dedicated by 'the seventh Archbishop of Cardiff'. It was a bitterly cold day let me tell you! The inscription on the tomb can now be read clearly. It says: *"Here lies the remains of Bishop John Cuthbert Hedley, a most learned and beloved pastor who, when close to death, expressed the wish to be buried amongst his flock"*.

Edrych ar gorffennol guda diolch Look at the past with gratitude

Byw yn y presennol gydag angerdd Live the present with passion

Cofleidio' dyfodol guda gobait Embrace the future with hope