

**14<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME**

**MASS IN THANKSGIVING FOR THE NEVILLE FAMILY**

**ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL CARDIFF**

**9 JULY 2017**

Today is a bitter sweet day for us all, but especially for St. John's College, for the Cathedral choirs which have glorified our worship for so many years, and for the Neville family who have formed and educated loved the children in their care since the foundation of the school. As at all times of great emotion, whether of happiness or sadness, success or failure, words are simply inadequate as we try to express what is deepest within us. If, on a human level, the right words are hard to find to express our deepest thoughts and feelings, we mustn't be surprised that so often words simply fail us it when we come to think and speak about God and the things of God.

Of course, we try. We say our prayers. We recite the creed, we learn our catechism and our theology. We even listen to sermons – sometimes! But when we have exhausted all the theory, all the explanations, all the theology, only one word remains. And that word is love. Love not just spoken about in theory, but put into practice by Jesus himself. I think this is what Jesus is explaining in today's gospel. *"I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to children"*. Because just as Jesus reveals God's love for humanity even when it takes him to death on the cross, so it is the unqualified love shown by parents and teachers for the children in their care which creates a healthy dependence, security, discernment, a relationship of trust

and love of life which in turn helps our young become co-creators of that civilisation of love which has to lie at the heart of any society in which they will play so important a part. This is true education.

I am conscious that I have used too many words and still haven't explained myself properly. Conscious, too, of some words of Cardinal John Henry Newman when he said *"I wanted to write you a short letter, but I didn't have time to prepare it. So, I have written you a long letter instead"*. When our words are too many, when they are inadequate, then sign and symbol and ultimately sacrament, have to take over, as well as art and music too, in order to convey our thoughts – and prayers. This is what St. John's College choir under David Neville, and Dominic and James, has done for us over so many years. You would expect me to use another art form this morning, and that is the language of poetry. When you buy a poetry book you get fewer words but much more meaning for your money! It has to be the Welsh poet R. S. Thomas, of course. He is attending a concert in Cardiff given by the famous Austrian violinist, Fritz Kreisler in the early sixties. This is what he says:

A memory if Kreisler once:  
At some recital in the same city.  
The seats all taken, I found myself pushed  
On to the stage with a few others,  
So near that I could see the toil  
Of his face muscles, a pulse like a moth  
Fluttering under the fine skin,  
And the indelible veins of his smooth brow.  
I could see, too, the twitching of the fingers,  
Caught temporarily in art's neurosis,  
As we sat there or warmly applauded  
This player who so beautifully suffered  
For each of us upon his instrument.  
So it must have been on Calvary  
In the fiercer light of the thorns' halo:  
The men standing by and that one figure,  
The hands bleeding, the mind bruised but calm,  
Making such music as lives still.  
And no one daring to interrupt

Because it was himself that he played

And closer than all of them the God listened.

Thank you, David, Diana, Dominic and James, for blessing us with heartfelt listening and participating Sunday by Sunday in the glorious music of our choir. Thank you to all musicians who “... *so gloriously suffer for each of us on their instrument*” not least to the sacrifice of time and energy you put into this work for the glory of God and the good of his people.

We thank you as we are recalled again and again to “*play ourselves in and through and with Christ*” in his self-offering which we share once more in Holy Communion today.

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