



Homily for the Mass of Chrism 2018

28 March 2018

Cardiff Cathedral, the Metropolitan Church of St. David

Archbishop George Stack

In December 2017, the Westminster Parliament initiated a consultation entitled *“Introducing ‘opt out’ consent for organ and tissue transplant in England”*. That consultation concluded on 6th March. Although I have good reason to be grateful for the science which makes organ transplantation possible, together with other bishops in England and Wales, I have registered my objection to this proposed legislation. And this in the light of members of my own family having both donated and received organs from others, and myself being a fully signed up member on the organ donation register.

The publicity surrounding the legislation, which is already law in Wales, speaks of the 6.500 people currently waiting for an organ transplant, and the fact that three people die every day in need of a suitable organ. 80% of people say they would be willing to donate their organs, but only 36% register to become organ donors. So why the objection – to say nothing of the fact that there has been a slight decrease in organ transplants in Wales since the “deemed consent” became law in 2015.

The ethical objection takes us to the heart of the dignity of the human person, the integrity of my being and who has “ownership” of my body whether I am alive or dead. One of the most generous gifts I can make, whether in life or in death, is the free gift of an organ to preserve the life of another person. But it is a gift. I am not the property of the state, or the medical profession, to be used in an obligatory way. Freedom lies at the heart of this debate too – as in many life issues.

That word heart. It isn't like any other word. It isn't like any other organ either. The heart is the beating rhythm of life without which no other organ can function or life be sustained. No wonder we speak about heart transplants in a more profound way. Not least because the heart also symbolises life itself, and love, and sacrifice. How easy it is to break another person's heart – especially those who are closest to us. The passage from the prophet Isaiah which Jesus quoted in the synagogue includes the words *“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me ... to bring good news to the poor. To bind up hearts that are broken”*.

Is not this the priestly work which those of us ordained in his service are called to do? To heal. To mend. To reconcile. To renew those drained of energy whether through the brokenness of life, the burden of sickness, the fears that weigh us down, or the weakness sin? We priests need to have big hearts, knowing what it is to forgive and be forgiven so that we in turn can personify the mercy and the forgiveness and the love of God. We do that so often in circumstances where people find it hard to experience that love – even in the depths of their own heart.

The vows we made at our ordination are signs that we do have big hearts – although along with our height they might shrink a little as we get older! How blessed we are that this year we shall have the ordination of three new priests – Robert James, Peter Davies and Nicholas Williams. Together with Laurence Bryce, our new deacon, they each have generous hearts. They have great gifts with which

they will serve God's people in the years to come. On behalf of the Church in this Diocese I thank them and all our priests for the generosity of heart which brings you to the day of ordination. At this Chrism Mass we renew the promises we made in the presence of God and of his people. Spiritual writers talk about the phenomenon of the Second Call, the grace which motivates us, which lies deep within us, sometimes untapped. The classical example is St. Teresa of Avila who, after years of struggle and mediocrity as a nun, walked by a picture of the passion of Christ and saw his heart broken through love. Her realisation of Christ's love for her as a unique individual inspired her to reform her Order and the Church – although she gave her parish priest, St. John of the Cross, a hard time in doing so!

In some ways, this Chrism Mass is a Second Calling. It is a reminder that every day we have to renew our commitment, not least in our prayer. *"Heart speaking to heart"* as Blessed John Henry Newman once wrote. I always add the words "In the silence of the heart". That is the time, that is the place, where we make good decisions, a prayer that will help to root out the natural selfishness which is the comfort zone of every person. *"A clean heart create for me, O God. Put a steadfast spirit within me"*. (Psalm 58:10)

Perhaps nowhere else outside the church building is a priest seen as most priestly than when he cares for the sick and anoints them with Oil of the Sick and gives the Last Rites. The love and mercy expressed in the anointing with oil at those most vulnerable moments of peoples' life – and death – makes it possible to evangelise, to announce that the kingdom of God is here perhaps to those who have little contact with us normally. This is particularly poignant

when so many of the things that we think are important have fallen away from us and we are laid low. “By this holy anointing, may the Lord in his goodness heal you and raise you up”. No wonder as we bless the Oil of the Sick, the Oil for Baptism and consecrate the Oil of Chrism for Confirmation and Ordination we will sing together:

“By this Holy Oil,

May we be renewed;

And our lost glory restored

By the Spirit’s power”.
