



**Homily for the Annual Mass for**

**School Teachers**

**8<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

**St. Joseph's Catholic High School, Newport**

**Archbishop George Stack**

Those of you with an Irish background will no doubt have heard of the Irish novelist Colm Tóibín. You may even have seen his film 'Brooklyn'. For me, his most unusual novel is called 'The Testament of Mary'. Mary is an old woman now, living in Ephesus and helped by St. John the beloved disciple. She reminisces on her life and tries to understand the extraordinary events which overtook herself and her son, Jesus. She wasn't impressed by his disciples, calling them "fools, twitchers, malcontents, stammers" Not quite gospel language!

It wasn't until the year 325 AD that the Church defined its belief that Mary was the Mother of God. Not that this hadn't been believed since the earliest days, but it was the challenge of the heretic priest Arius which provoked it. He said that Jesus was a humanly created being who became God, which caused the Council of Nicaea to define the divine origin of Jesus the Christ. Mother of God. *Theotokos*. What a thing to say about a human being!

From that truth flow all the other things we believe about Mary. They are like a mosaic or a tapestry created back to front. It is only when you turn them round can you see the full picture. So, her Immaculate Conception. Mary born without stain of Original Sin. God's prevision saw in this one woman a person who would be totally conformed to His will, never allowing pride, selfishness or sin to come between her and God's purpose being worked out through her. She is a

sign and symbol of everything humanity could have been – a paradisiacal state before the disobedience of Adam and Eve we heard about in the first reading. This is why we call Mary the new Eve.

She is also a sign and symbol of all that we shall one day be. United with God. Seeing and knowing ourselves as God sees and knows us. Of infinite value. Totally loved. Worth sacrificing Himself for us on a cross. Mary was never separated from God in life. Inseparable from God in death. Experienced the vision of God in her Assumption into heaven. The Orthodox Church call this feast her Dormition – her falling asleep.

Important for teachers is the fact that Mary is the sign and symbol of all that we are today as we strive to understand the meaning and purpose of our life of faith and transmit that to the pupils in our care. She can speak to the confused. *“How can this come about, since I am a virgin”*. (Luke 1:34). The Annunciation. She can speak to the single mother. *“Joseph, being a just man, and unwilling to put her to shame, decided to send her away quietly”* (Matthew 1:19). She can speak to the homeless the refugee and the exile. *“Take the child and flee into Egypt”*. (Matthew 2:13). She can speak to the perplexed parents of troublesome teenagers. *“My son, why did you do this to us. Did you not know your father and I would be searching for you?”*. (Luke 2:48)

Most of all she can speak to suffering humanity. She who stood at the foot of the cross, watching her son die an innocent victim of a cruel political and religious system. “Where is God in the midst of human suffering?” “Here”, says Jesus, with arms outstretched on the cross.

The devotion to Mary as Mother of the Church is a reminder that we are a pilgrim people, on a journey of faith, in common with each other needing guidance, support, mercy, love, forgiveness. None of us is self-sufficient, no matter what the advertisements tell us. Just as the young people you teach look to you as role models, so we can look at Mary, one who has trod the path that we have to tread in faith, hope and love.

Let me finish with some intercessions from the Litany of Our Lady of Walsingham – a great place for a school journey or retreat:

Mary at Nazareth	Pray for all families.
Mary at Cana	Pray for all married couples.
Mary at the Cross	Pray for all who suffer.
Mary in the Upper Room	Pray for all who wait.