



Homily for the Rite of Election

Sunday 1st March 2020

Cardiff Cathedral

Archbishop George Stack

The number forty is an important one, and that is not just because some people think that this is when life begins! Forty appears in the bible 159 times. I read it on a website, so it must be true!! Nonetheless, forty is a mystical number, a number that speaks of God intervening in the world.

Noah's flood lasted forty days and forty nights. Moses was forty years in Egypt and forty years in the desert before he saw the Promised Land. Jonah warned the people of Nineveh forty times that their city would be destroyed. He ended up in the belly of a whale for his troubles! And in today's gospel passage we read that Jesus went out into the desert for forty days and forty nights. This was as he set out on his public ministry. And he was tempted. Is this what God really wanted him to do?

We are familiar with the temptations. You can have all the bread you want, or money, or material goods. They will satisfy you, make you happy. Throw yourself off the pinnacle. Abandon yourself to irresponsibility. After all, God will protect you. But God is not at the bottom of the tower waiting to catch you. He is with you at the top holding on to you. All the kingdoms of the world. Power and popularity, social prestige, even so-called celebrity. A false god if ever there was one.

It was Oscar Wilde who said that I can resist everything but temptation. But the forty days journey of our Lent say that we can overcome temptation. We can identify those things which tempt and distract us, those things which take us away from what know to be really good and true and which will bring us fulfilment as persons. The journey to what is good and right and holy.

That journey is not somewhere “out there” over the rainbow. It is the journey within. To know ourselves as God knows us and calls us to be. Those among us today who are seeking to be baptised at Easter or Received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church have been making that journey all their lives. They now see that this is the time, this is the place. The Catholic Church is where communion, fellowship, forgiveness, support, meaning and purpose in their journey of faith is discovered, learned and lived. And how we admire you.

The journey within is a day by day, step by step, experience by experience time of prayerful discernment and discovery. “I did not know God could be found in such a place, in such a person, in such an event”. God has always been there for us. It is we who have become distant. “Be still and know that I am God”. This year the great convert Cardinal Newman was proclaimed a saint by Pope Francis. He came into the Catholic

Church because he was convinced there was nowhere else for him to go. He did not like everything about the Church and its externals. But he could write these beautiful lines about his journey of faith:

Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead thou me on.

The night is dark, and I am far from home.

Lead though me on.

Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

The journey of faith. One day at a time. The grace of the present moment. Another great English saint, Richard of Chichester, put it so well when he wrote:

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ

For all the benefits thou hast given me,

For all the pains and insults thou has borne for me.

O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,

May I know thee more clearly,

Love thee more dearly,

And follow thee more nearly, day by day.

Amen.
