Esgobaeth Llandaf
Diocese of Llandaff
Mae Ffydd Yn Cyfrif | Faith Matters

Bishop Mary's Presidential Address

O God, you made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

Amen.

It is wonderful for me to be here at our Diocesan Conference. We heard from the letter to the Hebrews words that offer a really good summary of what we are here for:

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, never giving up on gathering together but rather encouraging one another."

As well as to Mandy and Trystan, our brilliant speakers, I want to thank each and every one of you for your presence here today. Your time is precious and the gift of it towards working together as the family of faith here is so important. Our values and the way we are – how we treat one another as God's people is a powerful aspect of how we proclaim the Gospel.

In the synagogue in the Gospel we have just heard Jesus looked to the prophet Isaiah for some words to guide the people of his time. Those famous words of Jesus spoken on that occasion about his work have touched me in a particular way at this time.

In a moment we will look at how Jesus took those famous words of Isaiah that say *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me and sent me to bring good news…”* are set in a particular context by Isaiah. The prophet speaks of how these words will bring comfort to those who are mourning, to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of that of morning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

I feel that I have received from you, from the family of this diocese in so many ways your care and the power of prayer during my families sudden bereavement. It is an amazing thing to be prayed for and we have felt so upheld and strengthened by your love and your kindness.

It has felt that every single part of the church, those who know me well, and those who barely know me, those I have tried to minister to, and also those I have let down or not listened well enough to, have united and pulled together offering us an astonishing gift of prayer and kindness.

The capacity of goodness and love to overcome the power of suffering and death is truly amazing. And I want to bear witness to my experience of the amazing power of prayer. This has given me an even stronger glimpse than I already had of how God‘s love can make an enormous difference. I want to thank you for this, and I thank God for this too.

I am keenly aware of others who need this support, especially those whose needs may be less obvious; those who care caring for others, especially for elderly parents or for those who live with particular needs. Those who themselves are undergoing tests, treatment or who live with Stress or anxiety.

It would be wonderful if we could harness this way of love, offering that gentle, dignified, and comforting embrace to every single broken or hurting person that we encounter as church. I believe that this is the way of Jesus, this is what it means to live into recognising the image of God in one another. This is exactly the transformation that Jesus speaks of as he read the words of the prophet to the people of Nazareth the home of his family.

That vision that he declared to them as the good news of God is what we have drawn upon for the four priorities for our diocese that I spoke of last year at this diocesan conference.

I used the image of the four pillars of the Majestas at our Cathedral as reminders of our call to be people of prayer, learning, service, and Mission.

Jesus announces his good news in the synagogue on the Sabbath at prayer with his people.

During that act of worship, he stood up to read and to teach to help the people to understand scripture and to make the connection with their own lives. He wanted them and he wants us to learn to understand that scripture is fulfilled when we inhabit it through our choices and our living.

The way of Jesus brings release and healing to the suffering, liberation for the captives and the oppressed.

Jesus proclaimed that he is sent to bring this lived out Good News to all who need to hear it, especially to the poor.

I want to have these four calls of Jesus speak to you, how your prayer learning service and witness are encouraged and strengthened and where more support and resourcing are needed?

Learning more about this, sharing honestly and realistically will inform all our continuing work together. And sharing the gifts we already have will be key to our growth together.

We are possibly the most diverse Diocese in The Church In Wales in terms of our church tradition.

We have a choice about how we use our diversity, it can be a gift or a challenge. We may keep talking about how we want to get better at dignity, at speaking well of one another, at being kind, but doing this intentionally, habitually and consistently is harder. We need God's help and forgiveness, God's strength and courage to keep practicing this. We also need to grow in our capacity to forgive and encourage one-another.

If we do not work on ourselves, individually and together our church will model competition rather than collaboration, we will not model the unity that was the prayer of Jesus.

We may notice this choice of behaviour quite starkly when our behaviour becomes like a tug of war, for example over in the Church Growth Funds that we are looking to bid for, our our discussions around the common fund. As long as our mind-set is about "them and us" – my/our needs versus yours - we will be pulling apart.

Christ calls us **not** all to be the same, Christ loves us, all with our differences and calls us to work together with him. He calls us not to pull against one another. We can be like the guy-ropes on a tent – or like the pillars of the Majestas in our Cathedral – we can be rooted in our various traditions and affirm our distinctive worship and practice and still pull together to uphold Christ.

This is our calling, this is our shared vocation and our hope. The response belongs to all of us, and as we receive God's gift of himself at the Eucharist we ask for strength and blessing to do this.

God of all, thank you that you call us all to the wonderous company of your saints. Help us to know and recognise your gifts in ourselves and in one another. Bless us with the grace and courage we need to live this faithfully with joy, hope and courage to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

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