



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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HOMILY BY HIS EMINENCE
BERNARD CARDINAL LAW
ARCHBISHOP OF BOSTON
in St. Peter's Cathedral, Belfast
on Thursday, 29th June 1989

We gather around this altar in St. Peter's Cathedral, one in the faith which Peter proclaimed:- Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, our Lord and our Saviour. We are one in the faith of Paul - that greatest of all missionaries - who exclaimed: "For me to live is Christ". We come with an unshakable hope founded on the rock of Jesus' death and resurrection. We come with a long memory of God's unfailing presence with the Church: a memory which circles the globe from the Cross on Calvary's Hill to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome to the martyrs of Uganda and Japan to Maximillian Kolbe at Auschwitz and Father Hugh Mullen and Father Noel Fitzpatrick who fell not far from here.

We come here with no illusions: Discipleship is the following of Jesus; and the following of Jesus entails the cross of suffering and persecution and death. It entails His cross - the glorious cross of Divine Love. Ours is the hope born of faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, if the Cross we bear is indeed one of unconditional love for God and for every man, woman and child in whom we recognize the presence of God.

We gather as one with our brothers and sisters; we gather as the one Catholic Church throughout the world, one in faith with Peter's successor, Pope John Paul II, one in missionary fervour with Paul and with Patrick and with all those who spent themselves in bringing the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth.

We gather with that boundless hope which wrung from the heart of St. Paul that exultant cry that nothing can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

This Mass - like every Mass - draws us ever deeper into the mystery of God's love as we take the bread and take the wine which is His Body and Blood - and as we realize that in doing what He told us to do in memory of Him we show forth His death until He comes.

Those of us who have come from Boston and are here today have come on a pilgrimage of peace. This pilgrimage has not been planned in a vacuum however. While its purpose is religious, we did not come here by chance. Our choice flows from the political, social and economic turmoil which is part of life in Belfast and elsewhere in the North. Not to speak of that reality, not to call for that development and justice without which there can be no peace, would be irresponsible.

Every year since I have become Archbishop of Boston, I have made a public statement on Saint Patrick's Day, attempting to call the attention of the people of my country, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to the situation in Ireland, and especially to the situation here in the North. My reason for doing this is not political, nor is it an attempt to insert myself into other people's affairs. I have spoken and I will continue to speak however, as a pastor, a bishop like the good bishop of this local Church, who is deeply committed because of fidelity to the Gospel to speak the word of truth "in

season and out of season", with the hope that the concern and commitment of the Church might help to change hearts and stir consciences. My hope is that those who are responsible will hear the voice of a bishop who cares, and will recognise that this appeal is an appeal for each person to take his or her proper responsibility to bring about peace which is based on true justice for everyone. In these appeals I have been aided directly by your own Bishop Cahal Daly, whose wisdom and holiness have inspired me. May I today thank you publicly, Bishop Daly. You have been and continue to be an inspiration not only to your flock, but also to hundreds and thousands of people around the world who look to you for understanding and guidance when discussing the situation in Northern Ireland.

Yesterday and today Bishop Daly and I are touring Belfast, as well as places hallowed by the memory of Saint Patrick. More importantly, I listen to people of faith speak to me of the reality in which they are steeped. In some ways it is an eerie and strange experience. On the one hand, we are so close to the spirit of Patrick, praying at his resting place, drinking in the rich faith tradition of Ireland and being touched by the grace of God that seems almost palpable in the Irish air. On the other hand, we see the condition of this city, of this part of Ireland which reminds me in certain respects of the Southern United States which I knew as a priest in Mississippi in the 60's.

In the face of all of this, what can I say that you have not already heard? We know there must be an end to violence. We know, as the Pope, successor of St. Peter, so eloquently proclaimed during his pastoral visit ten years ago, that "violence is a lie", that it destroys the very reality it seeks to bring about. We know that no person has a right to take up arms to slaughter the innocent, whatever be the political or social motive. Violence is a lie, violence is wrong - whether perpetrated by the IRA or by Loyalist forces.

But even if the violence were to cease at this very moment the problems would not be solved, the difficulties would not immediately disappear. The unemployment rate, especially in the Catholic areas of this city, is just one stark fact reminding us that the systemic problems are economic, social, cultural and moral.

There cannot be a peaceful society where justice is not practised. There cannot be social harmony when unemployment is so high. The proposed new Fair Employment legislation presently before the British Parliament is being closely scrutinized in my country. It holds out the hope of significant improvement. I hope that it will be effective both in the short term and in the long term. It cannot be sufficiently stressed that without jobs there will be no justice. The opportunities for schooling must be available to all sectors and to all children. This presupposes adequate funding for all schools, particularly for those living in disadvantaged areas. Anything less is unjust and an inadequate response by the authorities to legitimate claims.

A better future is held hostage by the mad cycle of violence. Those who have political responsibility have an obligation not only to prevent violent acts however, but also to set in motion those actions that will improve the living standards of all the citizens of this city and of the North. We speak of fundamental human rights to life, to work, to housing, to a brighter future for one's children. The changes that already have occurred make more obvious the kind of changes which are necessary and point the way to a better future. Belfast must become a city in which every citizen feels equal because every citizen is equal and is protected by a law enforcement that truly has the good of all the citizens at heart, and which is so scrupulously impartial as to earn the respect of all citizens. New opportunities must be created so that young people will be able to finish their schooling and find jobs that correspond to their abilities, found families,

raise children and pass on to them the heritage and the culture that has blessed this land from the time of Patrick to our own day.

That heritage, I know, is a cause of great strength and comfort to you who are Ireland. It is in your music and your dance, in your stories and your literature. Yesterday I experienced that at Downpatrick and Saul. It is above all in your faith. I praise and thank God for the faith of the Irish people. May God bless you and keep you in that faith. I praise your bishops and priests and religious who have passed on that faith, who have staffed the schools you have maintained; I praise your Catholic schools that are not a cause for division, as some would claim, but are indeed a rich resource for building a more just and good society.

Whenever I have met with persons concerned about Ireland, including Irish and British officials, businessmen, men and women of culture, I have urged them to help restore the peace that so many in the North of Ireland seek by encouraging the investment of capital to make possible economic growth. In Boston, the Irish Ventures have encouraged new investment to come into Northern Ireland. I want today to renew a call made by so many for an increase in inward investment into Belfast and all the North. There is a great need to create new jobs by increasing the industrial productivity of this city and this region. It is my fervent hope that many business and political leaders will heed this appeal and respond with the means that will help this whole area, and especially this city, to develop economically as a means to aid its citizens to develop socially and culturally. None of that development will be worthwhile, however, if it is done with little or no regard for and at the expense of those moral values which reflect a culture steeped in faith. This faith is the strength of Northern Ireland. This faith is the hope of Northern Ireland. This faith is the life of Northern Ireland.

"Blessed are you Simon, Son of John You are rock and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

That promise Jesus made to Peter will never be taken from the Church. Century after century the Church has seen evil, has endured evil, but has never been overcome by evil. You are that Church today and you will not be overcome by that evil. You will "overcome evil with good." And you will do so with the whole Church beside you in faith-filled, hopeful support.

When the same Peter who professed his faith in Jesus was imprisoned, Luke tells us: "The Church prayed fervently to God on his behalf". Believe me. We pray fervently to God daily for every one of you. We pray that, like Peter, the chains that you now bear might drop from your wrists and that you might follow God's angel into the light of justice and peace, of harmony and hope for a future filled with promise for you and all your loved ones. The Church of Boston is with you. The Church of Rome is with you. The Church throughout the world is with you, for the Lord is with you and will continue to rescue you. "To him be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Bernard Cardinal Law
Archbishop of Boston.