

Homily preached by the Most Revd George Stack at his

Installation as the Seventh Archbishop of Cardiff

St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff

Feast of Saints Alban, Julian and Aaron

Proto Martyrs of England and Wales

20 June 2011

The Archdiocese of Cardiff and the Archdiocese of Westminster are united in a special way today, and not just by the Installation of a new Archbishop!

For the last six years, I have cared for the county of Hertfordshire as Auxiliary Bishop in Westminster. The town and Abbey of St Albans in Hertfordshire are named after the first Roman martyr of the 3rd century, Saint Alban. This Roman soldier met Christianity in an unexpected way. He literally bumped into it when he sheltered a Christian priest who was being hunted by the authorities. Inspired by the example and holiness of the priest, Alban took his cloak and disguised himself so that the priest could make his escape. On examination, Alban refused to betray the priest and was inevitably executed for proclaiming his Christian faith. He abundantly fulfilled the words describing the sacrifice of Jesus: "Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends". (John 15:13) At about the same time, two other Christian citizens of the Roman Settlement at Caerleon were also executed for their Christian faith. We know very little about them. What we do know is that they gave their lives for the faith. Down through the ages and to the present people continue to do the same. "The blood of the martyrs is the seedbed of the Church". (Tertullian. 3rd century.)

The word martyr simply means witness. Bearing witness to something greater than ourselves has always been a challenge. It is a demanding and difficult thing to do both personally and also as a community of faith which is the Church. We seek to bear witness to the truth about the human person, the truth about life, the truth about love. That truth is shown us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not just speak about the truth. He shows us what truth is. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". Jesus is the man for others, the one who willingly gave his life as the price of love. On the cross, Jesus did not withdraw God's love. He did not say "I have wasted my time. These people are unforgivable". On the cross, Jesus goes on revealing, goes on loving, goes on forgiving. In doing so, he breaks through the barrier that separates us from all that is good and true

and holy. He conquers suffering, sin and death. They no longer say the last word about us and to us.

No wonder one of the greatest Christian virtues is hope. Not a vague optimism that somehow things will get better. More a living belief that even in turmoil and confusion there is a meaning and a purpose to existence which cannot be fully explained in the here and now. A conviction that nothing is wasted in the sight of God.

As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to witness to those truths. We are challenged to give an account of the faith which gives us hope both in the public sphere and in our private lives. Pope Benedict XVI gave us an inspirational insight in his speech at Westminster Hall when he explored the essential relationship between faith and reason. He set out a path to help us navigate the social, economic and financial crises being faced by the western world. Whilst continuing to care for those who are poor in any way, and support the vulnerable and dispossessed, we must also have the courage and knowledge to challenge those structures of injustice which deprive people of the “tools for conviviality” which are essential for the development of a civilised society.

Perhaps we do not articulate our passion and compassion for the Common Good as well as we could. Perhaps we are misunderstood when we seek to contribute to the public discourse to the “Civilisation of Love” spoken of by Pope Paul VI. Perhaps the role of faith in re-forming our varied communities is sometimes distorted or deliberately misunderstood.

But the Church wants nothing except the good of all people. We are convinced that “The glory of God is humanity fully alive” (St. Irenaeus). We wish to witness to that “fullness of life” not just in what we say, but in what we do and who we are. Our Lord Jesus Christ asks nothing more or nothing less from those who call themselves his disciples.

+George Stack

Archbishop of Cardiff