

A Personal Manifesto for Catholics in the UK

Tonight I would like to sketch out for you a personal manifesto for Catholics in this country. Over the next six months the political parties will be publishing their own political manifestos as part of their campaigns in the run up to the General Election.

Simply put, a political manifesto is a public declaration of the changes that a political party wants to make to a whole range of things in this country. It sets out their vision of a better life, outlining their objectives and legislative agenda if they are elected to government.

Sadly, over the years fewer and fewer people bother to read political declarations because, rightly or wrongly, they think that once in power politicians forget the promises they make to the electorate.

So, tonight I want to rehabilitate manifestos as a vehicle for conveying ideas about real change.

However, one thing I need to get straight from the start is that as a Roman Catholic bishop I'm not proposing a political manifesto, but instead I want to set out a personal manifesto that each one of us can follow to bring about real change in our own lives.

In a way, one of the problems with political manifestos is they disempower ordinary people, because by accepting them when we vote we hand over power to change things to a professional political class.

I would imagine that some politicians hearing this would reply that if we feel disempowered we should join a political party and get involved in the political process! Until recently I would have encouraged young Catholics to do so, but realistically how welcome is the Catholic voice in British politics?

Would local party activists welcome young Catholics, who are pro-life, pro-adoption by a mother and a father, accept the Church's teaching on homosexuality, and question the effectiveness of 'safe-sex' education, just to name a few controversial issues?

Would a Catholic holding these principles nowadays be selected to stand in an election? I very much doubt it, but I hope to be proven wrong on this!

In reality Catholics and other traditional Christians are being marginalised in modern British politics.

Time and time again the truth about the dignity of human life from conception to natural death has been rejected by parliament, who have passed immoral laws that deny basic human rights to the most vulnerable individuals.

In many ways it's true to say that Catholics have been disenfranchised in this country because no party represents our position on fundamental moral issues.

At every election I have Catholics coming to me and admitting that they can't in conscience vote for any of the parties because in one area of policy or another they contravene the moral teaching of the Church.

Let me be clear here, I'm not saying that Catholics should abandon involvement in party politics, but we do have to be realistic about our chances at present of influencing policy-making.

But we shouldn't let this dishearten or discourage us about our chances of bringing about real change in this country.

One of the things that Pope John Paul II taught us is that political power isn't restricted to party politics, with its entrenched political elites in government and the media.

Polish Catholics resisted both the totalitarianism of Nazism and Communism for over fifty years through preserving their religious heritage and finding new ways of expressing it.

For example, as a young man Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope, and fellow students organised an underground theatre group to put on Polish plays and poems. They did this at some personal cost, because if they had been caught they would have been sent to the death camps.

By no stretch of the imagination are we facing the brutal totalitarianism suffered under the Nazis or communists.

But there is a pressing need in this country to counter-act the hostility of the press and TV towards the Catholic Church. I encourage students here to use all the types of media at your disposal to communicate Catholic ideas and truth – write plays, produce films, put clips on Youtube, design websites, etc. etc.

Pope John Paul shows us that the ability to bring about long-term, radical change can be achieved through a strong, self-confident religious identity, combined with courageous and innovative cultural expression.

I'd like to suggest to you that the impressive display of devotion from ordinary Catholics, and others, towards the relics of St Therese in October gives us a glimpse of the potential power of our traditional Catholic culture.

This is one of the reasons why I want to propose a personal, religious manifesto.

All effective social movements start with a small number of individuals committed to a vision, with a clear grasp of what they want to achieve and how they will achieve it.

A personal programme for change is the first step in taking back power, putting the power to make decisions and act back in our own hands.

I am convinced that if we change the way we see things to the way God sees things, and we change the way we do things to how Jesus does things then we'll lead happier and more fulfilling lives and be an inspiration to others.

And I'm sure we'll also bring about social and political change that will transform not only this country, but also the world.

In my talk I'm going to cover two areas:

First, I want to set out a vision of a better life for each one of us, and then I want to look at ways of making this vision a reality.

The Catholic vision of a better life

The first thing our personal manifesto needs to set out is the guiding vision that inspires us to seek a better life for our country and ourselves.

Listen to these words from Archbishop Oscar Romero:

'We long for peace, for justice, for a reign of divine law, for something holy, for what is far from earth's realities'.

The thing that is different between this vision and the vision offered by political parties is that it admits that we cannot achieve the peace and justice that we all long for without God.

Without God, without the reign of divine law, without the spiritual, the holy, at the centre of our lives as individuals and a nation we will never attain our dreams of peace and justice.

The tragedy of modern Britain is not only that we see no recognition of this need for the spiritual among many of our politicians, but also a vocal minority is attempting to drive God and religion out of public life in this country.

It seems that every week now we hear of a nurse or social worker being disciplined or even sacked for displaying a crucifix or witnessing to their faith in their work.

Last year I was summoned to appear before a House of Commons select committee because I had the audacity to insist that the Catholic schools in my diocese taught the Catholic faith, including the Church's teaching on sexual morality. The chairman of the committee even accused me of being a fundamentalist.

To be honest its becoming harder and harder for people to think that they have a spiritual nature. In schools, universities, and the media the constant message is, 'Humans are nothing more than highly developed animals.'

I've got no problem accepting that human beings are highly developed animals, who have a lot in common with other creatures on the planet. But it's obvious that we're more than this!

Looking at the man-made wonders of the world, such as Cathedrals, or the International Space Station, or Shakespeare's Sonnets I'd say that there's also something else involved in being a human being that makes us unique creatures.

Simply put, we're different from other animals on this planet because we are also spiritual beings.

The human person is a union of body and soul, which is another way of saying that we have a spiritual nature.

Our desire to be happy, our freedom of choice, our need for love, our seeking for truth, our joy in goodness and beauty, and our capacity to enter into a relationship with God are all expressions of this spiritual nature.

I am convinced that there is so much unhappiness and self-destructive behaviour through drugs, alcohol and sex because we are living in a spiritual wasteland, that doesn't meet our spiritual needs.

A country that is obsessed with ways of making and spending money is impoverished, empty and lost.

Mother Teresa, who I meet a number of times, said that there are many types of poverty in the world. And then she went on to say a most remarkable thing. She said:

"The spiritual poverty of the Western World is much greater than the physical poverty of our people in India. You, in the West, have millions of people who suffer such terrible loneliness and emptiness. They feel unloved and unwanted. These people are not hungry in the physical sense, but they are in another way. They know they need something more than money, yet they don't know what it is. What they are missing, really, is a living relationship with God."

We will begin to address the social and moral problems of this country when we all recognise and address our needs and the need for a living relationship with God.

As Archbishop Romero knew, speaking in the middle of a civil war in El Salvador that claimed over 100,000 lives including his own, we will only achieve peace and justice in our country if we have a place for the reign of divine law and holiness in our lives.

Simply put, Jesus shows us that every person is called to be holy. As Leon Bloy puts it, 'The greatest tragedy in life is not becoming a saint.'

I can imagine that some hearing me say this may think, 'This is ridiculous! This bishop's not in touch with the real world!'

But what does it mean to be holy?

First, I'd like to explain what I don't mean! Often in the media 'holiness' and 'sanctity' are portrayed as joyless, prudish, self-righteous, pinched, unworldly, even world

hating, and lifeless. These images have nothing to do with 'holiness', with being a saint.

This is how Mother Teresa described everyday holiness:

It is to live in peace and love with God and our neighbour, to help all those who have need of our hands, our words, our smile, our heart; to be always ready for sacrifice, for service, for love'.

If we love God and our neighbour like Jesus loved His Father and people with all our heart, we become like God. This is what being holy means, becoming more and more like God.

Once we consciously and wholeheartedly embrace this amazing destiny, God's life and love starts to transform us, to change us, so that we become saints, people overflowing with the life and love of God.

Saints are people who have found the meaning and purpose of their lives in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of God's love for each one of us.

St Paul perfectly captures the characteristics of people who are becoming holy:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (I Cor 13: 4-13).

Imagine what this world would be like if everyone realised his or her destiny to be a saint!

But sadly, so many of us settle for so much less from life, and then wonder why life seems meaningless and pointless!

All around us we see the tragedy of those who have chosen not to be saints, who instead choose the addictions of ego and status, money and self-indulgence, sex and promiscuity, power and violence.

And we all live with the consequences of a world based on the misuse of instincts not sanctity.

This is the world that Archbishop Romero calls the 'reign of night'. As he puts it,

'We decry every sin that is night that is darkness: drunkenness, gluttony, lust, adultery, everything that is the reign of iniquity and sin.'

Lets be honest, we all see this 'reign of night' around us in our country, and we've all got something of the night about us.

However, the remarkable thing is that our God-given inner drive for holiness is so much part of being a human being, that the second we choose to respond to God's invitation to share in his divine nature, he helps us start the long process of abandoning the reign of night in our lives.

Saints aren't people who no longer sin, saints are people who struggle against sin for a long time!

Therefore, the vision of our personal manifesto is meant to inspire us all to re-commit ourselves to love like God loves and struggle against the reign of sin in our lives.

Lets remind ourselves of this vision that sees us all becoming saints:

'We long for peace, for justice, for a reign of divine law, for something holy, for what is far from earth's realities'.

A story

I want to tell you the true story of a young man who sought to confront the evil of his day with the love of Christ. His name is Blessed Karl Leisner:

Karl, a Catholic youth worker who was imprisoned in Dachau Concentration Camp, shows us that we have the power to change things when Christ reigns in our hearts.

Born in Germany, Karl grew up in a large Catholic family and was taught by his parents to love the faith.

During his school days he had the reputation of being a leader and organiser of activities, so the school chaplain suggested he form a youth group. He was 12 years old.

Karl's youth group went on bicycle trips, which included the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as the high point of the day. They would play music and pray various prayers, including acts of devotion to Our Lady. After leaving High School, Karl entered Munster seminary, his one burning desire being to train for the priesthood.

When the Nazis came to power they banned the Catholic Church from involvement in youth work, because they wanted no rivals to their own youth movement, the Hitler Youth.

However, Bishop Clemens von Galen, an active opponent of Hitler and the Nazi regime, secretly appointed Karl as the director of diocesan youth work.

At weekends, Karl travelled throughout the diocese, visiting parishes to encourage Catholic youth to meet and pray together. He even organised 'informal' camping trips as a cover for young Catholics to meet and share their faith.

When the Nazis closed the Diocese' youth house Karl wrote:

"But we maintain our Christian, courageous, calm. Nobody will take away our will to struggle and fight back as long as He is with us. God is the ruler of the fates of men and peoples. This is our victory, which overcomes the world."

However, the Gestapo – the ruthless Nazis secret police – were not unaware of his activities. They watched his movements and read his mail.

Karl was ordained a deacon in 1939, but soon after was diagnosed with the serious disease Tuberculosis. While he was convalescing in hospital, the Gestapo came and arrested him. He was sent, with 2,000 Catholic and Orthodox priests, and other clergymen, to Dachau Concentration Camp for their resistance to the Nazi government.

Due to the brutal and inhuman conditions Karl's TB returned and worsened, and he was sent to the Camp Infirmary, where Catholic priests, deacons and other Christian ministers were singled out for medical experiments.

Of the 2,000 clergy, 1,000 would die from experimentation and brutality.

While Karl was in the so-called infirmary, he encouraged others to persevere, saying, "We accept all this for the sake of our young people".

Though Karl was very ill, he survived long enough to fulfil the desire of his heart. Bishop Gabriel Picquet, a French Bishop, was sent to Dachau in 1944, and he discerned that the time was right to ordain Karl to the priesthood.

The other prisoners made preparations in utmost secrecy, because if the ordination had been discovered by the guards they would have all been executed. They even made a set of vestments for Karl.

Karl was ordained in the midst of the worst inhumanity and evil, and celebrated his first and only Mass on the Feast of St Stephen, the first martyr.

He was too ill to celebrate another Mass. Though he survived until the liberation of Dachau by the US army in April 1945, Karl died the following August with his mother by his side.

The Nazis intended that Karl, along with all the millions they imprisoned, brutalised and murdered would be reduced to sub-humans, to things reduced to numbers who would be forgotten by history.

But Karl knew that victory would come, no matter how dark things became for him, because Christ reigned in his heart. And now 60 years after his death Karl's example and words inspire countless Christians around the world in their work with youth and their confrontation with evil.

In 1996 Pope John Paul II beatified Karl Leisner as a martyr of the Church. These words from Pope John Paul tell us the truth about trying to live holy lives:

"Karl Leisner encourages us to remain on the way that is Christ. We must not grow weary, even if sometimes this way seems dark and demands sacrifice. Let us beware of false prophets who want to show us other ways. Christ is the way that leads to life. All other ways are detours or wrong paths."

Blessed Karl Leisner shows us the power of holiness to overcome the policies and actions of worldly power. May he intercede for us that Christ will come to reign in our hearts also.

The principles of our manifesto

I am convinced that if Jesus' commandment of love really becomes the foundation and compass point of our lives God's power will begin to transform the reign of night into His reign of peace and justice, that Jesus calls the Kingdom of God.

'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. (Matthew 22:34-40).

A common misconception about the Catholic Church is that it imposes commandments on people through fear and threats. The truth is quite the opposite.

Jesus promises us that if we keep his commandments something really wonderful will happen to each one of us. This is how he puts it:

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. ...Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. (John 14:21,23).

These words are not figurative or metaphorical, but the truth attested to in the lives of countless women and men down the centuries.

If we keep Jesus' commandment of love we will gradually experience the presence of God in our hearts, that is, in the inner place where we are aware of ourselves and our thoughts we will also become aware of the loving presence of the divine 'other'.

In this most secret core of ourselves, this inner sanctuary of our deepest desires, thoughts and feelings, we will find ourselves alone with God who wants to invite us into friendship with him.

Jesus' promise subverts everything that our culture holds as being important and meaningful!

To meet God and be part of his inner circle, we don't have to be rich or powerful or famous. We don't have to be a celebrity or a member of an exclusive club or be royalty.

To meet God and be part of his inner circle we just have to love God and one another as Jesus loves God and loves others.

We just have to try, and the Holy Spirit will give us the power and inspiration to do it.

Lets now look at how we do this in practise.

You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind.

It is becoming increasingly common to hear people say that science has killed God.

By this they mean that no intelligent, reasonable, scientifically literate person can believe in the existence of a supernatural being called God.

The New Atheists raise an important question which none of us must dodge, 'how reasonable is it to believe in God in the light of our scientific knowledge?'

The New Atheists say that faith in an invisible, divine being is make-believe on a par with believing in elves at the bottom of the garden, or Father Christmas.

In this way they caricature and mock belief in God as irrational, delusional and even wicked.

For the New Atheists the only true knowledge is that which can be verified by the senses.

They have made it very clear that they have no tolerance or respect for people who have faith.

However, they ignore the fact that faith as a human act is essential to everyday existence, and is not just restricted to religion.

Pope John Paul II describes the modern world as comprising of countless acts of faith. As he puts it every person lives by belief. We entrust ourselves to the knowledge acquired by other people. (Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 31-32).

Faith is also a prerequisite for personal relationships, for without faith in the words and deeds of another, friendship and love would be impossible.

The truth of love and friendship – the most important, meaningful truths in our lives – are not primarily based on empirical evidence or critical reflection, but are apprehended through faithful self giving.

As Pope John Paul II puts it, 'in the act of believing men and women entrust themselves to the truth which the other declares to them'. (Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 32).

The point I'm making here is that faith and belief are not limited to religion, but are essential aspects of all human life. Faith is not unreasonable or irrational or exceptional, it is an attitude that makes our existence possible.

When we believe in God we trust a way of living handed down over three thousand years since God called Abraham and Sarah out of what is now modern day Iraq.

Most importantly, we must put our trust in the person of Jesus Christ whom we encounter in the life and teachings of the Catholic Church.

We must also trust that our own personal experiences of God give us access to a realm beyond what we can see, hear or touch.

Sometimes these religious experiences can be so extraordinary and vivid that we have no doubt that we have encountered a living person or divine reality as objectively real as anything we have encountered in the world.

Speaking for myself, I have no problem trusting the Faith of the Church or my own religious experience.

I know that the Lord God whom I love with all my heart, all my soul and all my mind is not make-believe but is a real, living, spiritual being who I encounter in so many ways everyday.

As someone who has loved God for as long as I can remember I want to recommend three practical ways for you to express your own personal love for God.

These three actions will help you bring about real change in the way you live your lives, which is the goal of our personal manifesto:

1. Love God with all your heart.

It's important that we all receive the sacraments with greater awareness and greater devotion.

- How many times have we received Holy Communion without giving it a second thought? How often do we kneel in silence after communion in order to focus on the presence of Jesus in the sanctuary of our hearts?
- When was the last time you availed yourself of the forgiveness of God in confession?

Its so easy to get into the habit of seeing the sacraments as 'things' that we do, that we receive, when the whole point about sacraments is that they are the actions of Jesus Christ.

If we only focus on ourselves when we receive the sacraments then our ego gets in the way of Christ entering into our heart.

We all need to wake up to how serious, how awesome it is to receive the sacraments.

Listen to these words from Blessed Charles de Foucauld, a Catholic priest who lived as a hermit among Muslims in the early 20 th century

'Communion is more than life, more than all the good things of this world, more than the whole universe. Call to mind the unimaginable goodness of Jesus, who did not merely give Himself to us at His birth, but is still in our hands until the end of the world'.

There are a number of things we can do to deepen our sacramental awareness:

- Set aside time before Mass or Confession to prepare yourselves, and to spend time in silence after receiving communion or absolution.
- Regularly pray before the Blessed Sacrament.
- Read good Catholic books on devotion to the liturgy, such as those by Pope Benedict.
- Volunteer to help prepare children and adults to receive the sacraments. In my experience nothing helps us appreciate the sacraments better than through teaching about them.

2. Love God with all your soul.

I'm convinced that many of us are suffering a type of soul sickness because of the absence of silence and stillness in our lives.

The agitation, confusion and lack of peace that many of us feel is due to the constant noise and activity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Even when we sleep, many of us are disturbed either by being over-stimulated by the day's activities or by bad dreams?

Silence is essential for our physical and emotional well being, but it is even more important for our spiritual well being.

As Mother Teresa puts it:

We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls."

If there is no silence in your life you will have difficulty in finding God, let alone loving Him. Silence gives the soul a chance to breathe, and regain balance.

Though its becoming harder to find places of silence, try to spend time in the silence of a beautiful church or out in the beauty of the countryside

Once you have found external silence, the next challenge is to find inner silence, by which I mean turning your focus away from the constant stream of thoughts and feelings.

One simple way of attaining inner-silence is through the rhythmic praying of the rosary. The repetition of the prayers and the focus on the mysteries of Jesus and Mary's lives turns our inner-focus away from ourselves and on to God.

Another method of finding inner silence is to pray the Jesus Prayer, which acts like a mantra that gradually silences the endless chatter of our minds.

Its simple really, just slowly repeat over and over these words, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'.

There are a number of ways of finding silence:

- Set aside some time during the week to be silent, maybe even setting aside part of Sunday as a time for quiet reading and prayer.
- At least once a year go on retreat to a monastery or convent. I know money is tight for students, but you will find that retreat centres offer bed and board at reasonable rates.
- Buy a set of rosary beads and develop the habit of praying them every day.
- You may find it beneficial to join a Christian Meditation Group that follows the teachings of Fr John Main.

3. Love God with all your mind.

Next year we will celebrate a great event in the life of the Church in this country, and in this archdiocese, the beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman. And naturally I want to turn to this exceptional Christian thinker to reflect on how we love God with our minds.

As students, at present your lives are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, and developing academic and professional skills. And in these ways you are developing your minds.

I want to talk to you about a type of knowledge that is being forgotten due to education in this country focusing one-sidedly on technical skills and competencies.

This is what Cardinal Newman says about this forgotten type of knowledge, called wisdom:

To those who have begun with faith, God adds, in the course of time, a higher gift, the gift of Wisdom, which, not superseding, but presupposing, Faith, gives us so broad and deep a view of things revealed, that their very consistency is evidence of their Author, and like the visible world, persuades us to adore His Majesty...

“I will not call you servants any longer” He says, “because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father’. (John 15:15).

Simply put, wisdom is sharing in the mind of God.

When you received the sacrament of confirmation you received the capacity to receive this second gift from God, His gift of wisdom. Maybe you have exercised this capacity, maybe it still awaits your active co-operation.

I will make two suggestions to you tonight that will help you receive God’s gift of wisdom

- If you haven’t already got a copy buy the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of the Catechism* and make them the books that you have by your bedside with your copy of the Bible.
- My second recommendation is that you take advantage of the fact that you are not far from one of the important centres of Catholic education in this country, and the world, Maryvale Institute. There you’ll find a whole variety of courses that will help you grow in the gift of wisdom.

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.

I’ve spent most of my life as a priest and a bishop dedicated to promoting the Catholic understanding and practice of social justice. When I was a priest, and later bishop in Westminster I worked with Cardinal Basil Hume to establish *The Passage Day Centre*, London’s largest voluntary day centre for homeless people. Each day it helps more than 300 homeless and vulnerable men and women. In the Passage Day Centre, I came to recognise that in many ways the poor had more to give me than I had to give them. This was a profound experience and one which has remained with me ever since, thank God.

To be honest I’d need more than one talk to share with you my vision of how we must love our neighbours as ourselves, so I’ll have to content myself by saying this.

If we have come to the realisation that deepening our relationship with God is a fundamental priority for our own lives, we also have an obligation to do something about the spiritual poverty in our society.

If we are serious about bringing real change to our country we have to deal with this growing problem of spiritual poverty, that I mentioned earlier in my talk.

You may know this from your own experience that many of our contemporaries are allergic to Christianity, not because they really know anything about it but because of the suspicion, hostility and ridicule that pervades our culture.

Often their only encounter with Christianity and the Church will have been an unflattering caricature relentlessly repeated through education and the media.

The challenge facing us in combating spiritual poverty is finding new ways of bringing the truth of the Gospel into our culture.

The first thing that needs to be made clear is that we must at all times respect the consciences of other people.

The Church firmly holds that the individual has an inalienable right to exercise freedom regarding the acceptance or rejection of religion.

No one can be forced into the Faith, they can only be invited.

So the question remains, how do we bring Christ to people who are spiritually impoverished while at the same time respecting their consciences.

I think we first need to realise that we are not a sales team trying to sell an unpopular product to resistant consumers.

Instead, we need to take an image from the New Testament and begin to see ourselves as *Temples of the Holy Spirit*.

It may seem strange to you thinking of yourself as a *Temple of the Holy Spirit*. Think of it like this, sometimes people who are on a diet or only eat organic food say they treat their bodies like a Temple.

Well, in the New Testament God tells us that each one of us is a *Temple of the Holy Spirit* through receiving baptism and the sacraments.

What does this mean in practice?

As Archbishop Oscar Romero puts it:

When we leave Mass, we ought to go out the way Moses descended Mount Sinai: with his face shining, with his heart brave and strong to face the world's difficulties.

When we know deep down that we are *Temples of the Holy Spirit* each one of us will have a sense of our own inherent dignity that comes from receiving God in the sacraments.

We will also have the confidence to witness to our faith, no matter what difficulties and hostility we may face.

Receiving the sacraments, praying in silence and growing in wisdom should make a huge difference to how we live our lives, and how we treat other people.

If we truly embrace our calling to become holy people we will be known as thoughtful, patient, considerate, loving and caring by everyone we meet.

But more than this, as through our presence in society we silently carry the blessing of Christ among family, friends, fellow students, lecturers and strangers and those who are in difficulty.

As Blessed Charles de Foucauld puts it:

We sanctify – we bless – souls by silently carrying Jesus among the people we meet today, as Mary carried Jesus to the unborn John when she visited her cousin Elizabeth.

In the words of Cardinal Newman, we must preach Jesus without preaching, ‘not by words but by our example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do, through the fullness of our love for everyone we meet.

I thank you for your patience.

May Christ the King bless you all.

Patrick O’Donoghue, Emeritus Bishop of Lancaster
22nd November, 2009