

**Bishop Willie Walsh: Homily, St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.**

**17 March 2011**

La 'Le Phadraig 2011: St. Patrick's Day 2011.

A few weeks prior to St. Patrick's Day of 1959 I was ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church.

Saint Patrick's Day of that time was a day on which we proclaimed, sometimes rather loudly, our pride in our Irishness, in our catholicity.

We spoke proudly of being the most catholic (meaning Roman Catholic) country in Europe.

Our seminaries and houses of religious were full of bright young people.

Our churches were crowded.

Our missionaries were carrying the good news of Christ across the world.

Our pride in and our sense of wellbeing as church were understandable at that time. I would also understand however if our brother/sister Christian Churches might have sensed our celebration as somewhat triumphalist and less than inclusive.

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All has changed in the intervening years. Certainly in my own Church triumphalism is well and truly over and I do not regret its passing. Revelations of recent years have left many of us humbled. And perhaps that is a good position to be in for a Church that preaches a humble Christ as a model for our inspiration.

Thankfully too there is a much greater realisation today that La 'Le Phadraig belongs to all of us – to those of us of Christian faith, of other faiths and of none, to those whose families have been here for generations and to those who have come here in recent years. And La 'le Phadraig 2011 calls for a different kind of celebration, a different understanding of our Irishness, than the Patrick's Day of half a century ago.

Of course there is much that we can still be proud of on this 2011 feast of Patrick. We can and should still salute and celebrate the millions of people who constitute the Irish diaspora.

We celebrate:

1. The thousands of young Irish working (with voluntary organisations such as Trocaire, Concern, Goal and others) to try and help the poorest of the poor towards a better life. And your own "The Bishops 'Appeal" which addresses world poverty.
2. We salute the men and women of our armed forces on international peace-keeping missions.
3. We remember the past and present day missionaries from all our Churches.

However, the pervading sense of my being Irish on this La 'Le Phadraig 2011 is that of a citizen whose country has a great deal to be proud of in its past but is now in significant crisis economically, socially and spiritually. Equally, it may be said that despite our difficulties there is **Hope** for the future in that unique spirit of co-operation and neighbourly support which we Irish people have

brought in the past to various human crises marked by a spirit of hard work, creativity and innovation.

Our sense of Hope however must not deny the present reality facing our country and the immense challenge it is to that unique Irish spirit. Most of us are only too well aware of the financial turmoil that has gripped our country in recent times. That turmoil is sometimes measured in economic statistics which in themselves are frightening. It is far more frightening however when these statistics translate into thousands of stories of human suffering – stories of people who have lost their jobs, their businesses, their life-savings and even their homes. It is hard for those of us who are not so affected to imagine what it must be like for fathers and mothers frightened by the prospect of not having a home in which they can rear their children in security and love.

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We have a new government in place and we hope and pray that they may provide us with the necessary leadership to help us get through this crisis.

We have however been reminded time and time again that we cannot and will not overcome this crisis unless we find a new sense of solidarity in which those of us who are lucky to have jobs are willing to share the pain involved in trying to get it right.

I believe that our Christian faith can and indeed should contribute in a special way to that renewed sense of solidarity. That solidarity is rooted in the Christian call to love of neighbour, the Christian call to care for those in need, the Christian call to “bear each other’s burdens” (Gal.6:2).

That solidarity is not just about donating to charity. It is also about justice. It is about people working together in mutual trust. It is about employer and employees working together for the benefit of all. It is about particular interest groups accepting their responsibility not just to wield their power for their own benefit without consideration for the common good. It is about all of us working to a vision of society where every person has an opportunity to live a dignified life. It is about seriously challenging a consumerist capitalist system which has too easily accepted a grossly inequitable distribution of the fruits of

our labours. The task is not an easy one. It is a task which requires a real sense of Christian generosity.

At times like this we sometimes hear people say “I have worked hard for what I have got” somehow implying that it is unfair to expect them to carry the burdens of others. This attitude is understandable, but it fails to recognise the Christian viewpoint that much of what we have is in fact received as “gift” from God.

I was fortunate to grow up in good farming land in North Tipperary I was gifted with a fairly normal secure family life. I was gifted by always having sufficient food and shelter and never in serious want. I was gifted with years of education and I believe that the vast majority of us who are gathered here in this St. Patrick’s cathedral today have been similarly gifted. Surely a sense of gratitude for this giftedness ought to characterise our lives at this time rather than any sense of a hardening of heart towards those who are in need of our help.

The late pope John Paul the second in a letter which he wrote at the beginning of the new millennium spoke of the need for Christians to recognise that the gifts given us are not gifts for us alone but gifts to be shared. That recognition that the gifts we have are gifts to be shared is at the heart of Christian solidarity.

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Our churches in recent years have been muted in regard to our rich social teaching developed over the years. That muteness at least on the part of my own Church was probably due to the fact that trust in our Church had been so severely damaged by revelation of scandal. It is time to find our voice again, to find our voice not to dictate to democratically elected leaders but to challenge ourselves in our role as Christian citizens.

The Irish Episcopal Conference has recently found its voice in the shape of a letter entitled “From Crisis to Hope”. I believe it is a letter which would find agreement among all Christian Churches. The letter speaks of a new vision inspired by the belief in the “inalienable worth of every individual” as created

in the image and likeness of God and offers a response to the present situation, a response that is founded on hope and on a commitment to the common good.

Over the past twenty years we saw individualism grow out of control in our society. That attitude of rampant individualism fed and in turn was fed by our Celtic Tiger and ultimately led to its demise. Christian solidarity is the antithesis of the excess of individualism which has done so much damage to our society.

In recent years Ireland has indeed suffered significant failure of our institutions (including the Catholic Church) with a consequent loss of trust in our banks, our regulatory agencies and many other state agencies including the government itself.

We have been angry and justifiably angry at what has happened to our country and for those who are still suffering deeply as a result it is hard to let that anger go. And yet we cannot allow ourselves as a people to become so immersed in our anger that we cannot move forward together in solidarity and in hope.

Solidarity and Hope remind us of the people of Japan who are suffering so much at his time as the result of a horrendous natural disaster. On this our national day of celebration our hearts go out to the people of Japan and we pray for their wellbeing.

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La 'Le Phadraig: a time for Christian gratitude for the gifts we have received.

La'Le Phadraig: a time for bearing each other's burdens even when the bearing is painful.

La 'Phadraig: a time for a renewed spirituality of Christian solidarity and Hope.

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