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### Jubilee Eucharist Homily - 150th Anniversary

All Hallows College

Dublin, Ireland

July 23, 1992

*Readings: Isaiah 63: 7-9*

*1 Cor, 1: 3-9*

*Matthew 28: 16-20*

Welcome home, my brothers! If home is where the nurturing takes place, then for most of us in this chapel All Hallows is truly our home. Within these walls we absorbed something about Christ and Church and mission. Within this sanctuary we were priested. From this campus we were sent, perhaps with more docility than comprehension, to "the uttermost parts of the earth." And today we have returned, perhaps with a little more comprehension than docility, to this sacred place because there is that intangible quality which draws us back, that search for roots, that quest for meaning, that yearning to go home again even for only one last time. Such is the pull of All Hallows, the 150 years young Alma Mater, "the Mother Fair," the siren call of "the old lady of the Tolka," as Father Purcell frequently called her, perhaps to recapture anew the nostalgic other-worldliness of Belloc's lines:

*I will hold my home in the high wood  
Within a walk of the sea  
And the men that were boys when I was a boy  
Shall sit and drink with me.*

And who owns this house "which is within a walk of the sea?" Let me quote Father Purcell once again. He was a mentor for many of us, a worthy representative of the Vincentians to whom we all owe so much and who along with Fathers O'Donnell, Fagan, Lane and Rafferty have faithfully passed on the vision of priestliness authenticated by St. Vincent de Paul. Speaking to an ordination class in the 50s, Father Purcell, in one of those rare moments when I think I understood his sometime mystical musings, was abundantly clear on the question. "All Hallows," he said, "does not belong to anybody. It does not belong to the Vincentians: they only administer it. It does not belong to a diocese. The real owners of this All Hallows which we see and feel around us here are the men who have graduated here. They are the only real All Hallows men, for it is they who own its spirit." (Father Purcell: address to the 1958 priests). Like Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, let us savour these days together and give thanks to God for the many ways in which he has enriched us. Look around you. The combination of graying and over-tonsoured heads along with smaller ordination classes in recent times means that we will never see this sight again but, if

God so will, others will. We stand on the shoulders of some mighty men who have gone before us or as Yeats puts it so gracefully, “under every dancer a dead man in his grave.”

There must be some intellectual discipline which traces the influence of a religious leader’s personal qualities—or charisma, if you will—upon his or her spiritual descendants. The missionary Patrick was particularly successful in this regard especially when it came to imprinting an irresistible ducal which impelled generations of his disciples to go on a perpetual pilgrimage, a *peragrinatio pro Christo*; some even called it a “white martyrdom,” the leaving of one’s family and homeland for the sake of the gospel. And let’s not forget the sacrifices and the prayers of these families who willingly prepared and gave their sons to the missionary priesthood. Daniel-Rops, the French scholar, called it the “Irish miracle” when, commenting on Patrick’s missionary initiative, he described, “a country which had only just been baptized . . . already . . . dreaming of giving Christ back to the world.” St. Columban in what we know today as his Fifth Letter affirms that, “All we Irish inhabitants of the world’s edge are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul.”

In Columban’s era it was Iona, Lindisfarne, Perrone, St. Gall, Bobbio, Wurzburg and Lucca but for All Hallows’ sons it has been the world—Melbourne, Miami, Middlesbrough, Munich and a couple of Manchesters. It has been Port Elizabeth, Pittsburgh, Perth and a couple of Portlands. It has been Sydney, Southwark, Savannah, Sacramento, Shrewsbury, Sale, Seattle and a couple of Springfields.

By human standards Father John Hand, should never have succeeded. He was, to some, a sickly dreamer; he had a totally unrealistic budget and far less revenue than he expected; and the majority of the Irish bishops were openly skeptical about his competence. And yet with the benevolent consent of Archbishop Murray of Dublin and the practical support of the then Lord Mayor of the city, Daniel O’Connell, he secured Drumcondra House the acreage around it. Above the main entrance, deeply embedded in the stone work are the words EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES. This was not the work of a timid man. This was no tentative temporary sign: despite all the difficulties, and there were many, this was the declaration of a man of faith, a man of persistence, a man of unshakeable vision. Fr. Hand was dead within a few years but he bequeathed this gospel mission statement to his successors and to his students. To claim that the establishment of All Hallows was fortuitous because it came a few years before the worst annual onslaughts of the great famine is at best an understatement. The blood-letting of emigration had already begun long before the famine reached its greatest severity. “In the half-century before the famine (1845-49) almost a million (Irish) had gone to North America, while at least half that number had emigrated to England and Scotland.” Indeed, the foundation of All Hallows was providential insofar as it became an indispensable component in a tragic drama of epic proportions in which a battered and beaten and hungry people, taking with them the language of their oppressors, took to the seas rather than die by the roadsides or in the Poor Houses, and in so doing successfully established English-speaking Catholicism across the globe. Take away the famine, take away Irish emigration, take away missionary semi-

naries in the mould of All Hallows and there would be extremely few English-speaking Catholics in the Roman Church. EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES, from our gospel reading, is repeated by all four evangelists in one form or another. In his encyclical letter "Redemptoris Missio," John Paul II, more than any of his predecessors a truly missionary Pope, analyzes this mandate of the Risen Christ. He stresses the fact that all of us as missionaries must believe in the power of the gospel to transform both ourselves and those to whom we are sent. He emphasizes the continuing need for lifelong missionaries AD GENTES and while never slighting the role of the priest missionary he clearly encourages others to take up the challenge of the missionary apostolate, a factor which All Hallows is addressing more and more especially when this encyclical is paired with the clarion call of "Chistifideles Laici."

There is further development of missiology which likely to come to the fore in the years ahead. Traditionally we have tended to think of the impact those who are sent have on the people and the culture to whom they are sent. All Hallows has done this, with justifiable pride, for 150 years. Yet this may be only half the story. In secular terms if I give something away I have less and the other has more. Theologically, there has to be a more enriching experience. If I give in faith as part of the redemptive process then the giver is never depleted. Frequently, indeed, the giver is enriched as are those whom he serves. This happens in prayer and it is most clearly discerned in the Mass. Sharing Christ, sharing one's faith actually strengthens the faith of the giver. Some call this concept "reverse mission" and in large measure we have ignored its implications. Maybe, on this significant anniversary, the time has come to explore its potential so that both All Hallows and the Church in Ireland can reap the benefits of renewal and revitalization.

Since the Second Vatican Council both the seminary and the priesthood have had to renew themselves to face the pastoral demands of a restless society in which the only constant is change.

It has not been easy.

It is no secret that rapidity of change and secularization of our culture has frustrated expectations, confused our priorities and increased the tensions of pastoral leadership and ministry.

But these are the challenges that every priest, young and old, must expect to face in a dynamic Church. The priesthood belongs to Christ and we are privileged to actualize him to others despite our all too human frailties and limitations. Everything we do is mumbo jumbo unless we allow him to work through us.

We can still surprise ourselves and others by stirring up the grace of ordination as John Hand did so eloquently and with such prophetic effectiveness a century and a half ago.

And what about the future? John Henry Cardinal Newman, no stranger to this College, influenced the future of the Church much more than we will ever comprehend. Never-

theless, his lines are often quoted:

“I do not see the distant shore: one step enough for me.”

Neither do I see the distant shore but I can report that All Hallows is alive and well. It is not the same as it used to be but then neither are we. New apostolic challenges are opening up: new vistas “for foreign fields” are coming into focus and with God’s grace All Hallows will be among the first to respond.

Our opening reading was a psalm from: the Book of Isaiah:

“Let us sing the praises of God’s goodness and of his marvelous deeds—in return for what he has done for the great kindness he has shown us in his mercy and in his boundless goodness.”

We must be conscious of the creativity of God’s word.

The speaker here, in looking to the past, wants to quicken remembrance of God’s deeds. This is much more than a recalling to mind of what is history. Within this hymn of gratitude there is an appeal to that gracious will, which once upon a time wrought these gifts, to perform them afresh. When John Hand went to Rome in the 1840s he asserted that there were in Ireland “some hundreds of young men. . .who would gladly offer themselves for the foreign missions.” When that day comes again All Hallows will be here to lead hem to the altar and Mary of the Assumption will be in the rose window over my shoulder to wave goodbye to wish them well as they process down this aisle for those corners of the vineyard where the needs are greatest. EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES.

AMEN

\*\* Bishop Boland’s homily marked the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of All Hallows. At that time, he was Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama.