



**Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland**  
**Bishop Emeritus**  
**Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

**James Cardinal Hickey**  
First Anniversary Mass  
St. Matthew's Cathedral  
October 24, 2005

**Readings:**

Job 19: 1, 23-27  
Corinthians II 5: 1, 6-10  
Luke 24:13-35

A small tributary by anybody's standards, the River Deel waters the fertile fields of Co. Limerick and shortly before it empties itself into the Shannon estuary it passes through the market town of Askeaton. Tourists come here to view the ruins of Desmond Castle and the Franciscan Friary, both of which flourished long before Columbus discovered America. This was "Hickey country" and in the early days of his priesthood the young Father James Hickey visited Ireland to see the townland from which his ancestors emigrated as a result of the Great Famine. He shared with me his recollection of an incident which engraved itself on his memory. Visiting one of the local churches he viewed a wall plaque erected to honor a long-deceased pastor. It read, 'Sacred to the Memory of the Very Rev. James A. Hickey, P.P.' (In Ireland Pastors are given the designation P.P., Parish Priest.) "I thought," he told me, "I was reading my own obituary!"

He could not have foreseen that two generations later his illustrious obituary would be far too long for any marble plaque, that he would be interred in a marble vault in a chapel appropriately dedicated to St. Francis and that his Cardinal's hat would be suspended high above the worshippers who daily come to this sacred place to honor God. Along with the Faith which he inherited from the land of St. Patrick he was also imbued with the calling of his ancient Gaelic ancestors – the medical men of the clans, the healers, were known as "hickees." You may recall that the Cardinal's father was a dentist in Midland, Michigan while he himself followed the example of the divine physician in tending and healing and worrying about the souls entrusted to his pastoral care in Saginaw, Rome, Cleveland and, for a score of years, here in our nation's capital.

Cardinal Hickey received many honors during his 84 years. He accepted them with grace but, like Job in our first reading, he tolerated them as secondary to his conviction that his most important honor, and in reality the only one worth striving for, was to meet his Redeemer face to face.

"My own eyes, not another's,  
shall behold Him  
and from my flesh I shall see God;" (Job 19:27)

He would have welcomed and approved this anniversary Mass because like Monica, who

begged her priest son Augustine to remember her often at the altar of the Lord, he craved the same remembrance.

Long before his final illness, which in itself contained a lesson for us all, he made his own the insight of St. Paul "Therefore, we aspire to please (God), whether we are at home or away. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil." (II Corinthians, 5: 9-10)

It is not my intention to elucidate in detail the events and the incidents and the initiatives which constituted the life of James Aloysius Hickey, priest and bishop. Such information is readily available elsewhere and is the stuff of biographies.

All will agree, however, that he changed the face of this archdioceses during his twenty years tenure.

Cardinal McCarrick, I don't think you will find too much territory left over for new parishes! He foresaw the pastoral needs of the rapidly increasing Spanish-speaking population. He acted decisively and with great compassion to respond to the tragedy of AIDS. The sisters of Mother Teresa, seated here this evening in great numbers, were a major part of his response in this regard. He knew that a good education was the greatest gift he could offer the marginalized of this city and there was only one thing better, a good Catholic education! Values, in his book, were as important as knowledge and expertise.

There is one pastoral area which cannot go unmentioned. It pained the Cardinal to realize that within a few miles of the Capitol and the White House, symbols of the most affluent nation on earth, there were people who slept on the streets, children who went to bed hungry every night and the chronically ill who could not afford even the most elementary medical attention. He prayed, he twisted arms, he raised money, he cajoled and he insisted so that today this archdiocese can number outreach programs for the poor which are the envy of many. Never enough, of course, but better than most.

How did Cardinal Hickey wish to be remembered? Let me quote his own words.

When asked 16 years ago by a *Washington Post* reporter how he would like to be remembered, Cardinal Hickey responded:

*First, I'd like them to say he was always loyal to his Church.*

*Second, that he was a friend to Catholic education.*

*And third, if they don't want to say the first two, at least I would hope they would chisel on the stone, "He served the poor." (1989)*

We can all say "AMEN" to that.

I was privileged to serve on Cardinal Hickey's staff for a few years and he honored me by being one of my co-consecrators when I was named Bishop of Birmingham.

I would suspect that his greatest moment of anguish was the day he received the terrible news that three women religious and one lay volunteer were murdered in El Salvador. He had asked two of them to prolong their mission in that troubled land. And yet, in the words of the of the convert poet Aubrey de Vere, a native of his ancestral home of Askeaton, he counted this

affliction as “God’s messenger sent” from heaven and always to be received “with courtesy.” Probably his greatest joy was the invitation from Pope John Paul II to give the annual Lenten retreat to the Papal Household on a topic so close to the Cardinal’s heart, the role of Mary in the salvation of all God’s children. Let me just say, it was a busy time! But it was his finest hour.

Great men are not dead as long as they are remembered. The monuments of Washington are testimony to this concept. The canonization of saints ensures the same immortality. Long-fellow enshrined the idea in his well-known *Psalm of Life*.

*Lives of Great men all remind us  
we can make our lives sublime,  
Footprints, that perhaps another,  
and, departing, leave behind us  
sailing o’er life’s solemn main,  
a forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
seeing, may take heart again.*

In many ways we are all “shipwrecked brothers.”

It is an understatement to say that we have created an angry world, a deeply divided nation and a wounded Church. We need to “take heart again.” What can we learn from Cardinal Hickey as we experience the turbulence of the surrounding storm? My reflection is obviously subjective but I don’t think he would support those who maintain that as Catholics the time has come to retreat to our sacristies, raise the drawbridge and drop the portcullis. He would, I submit, see this as an understandable but purely human reaction, a siege mentality, a failure of nerve. Rather, he would ask us to ponder the example of the two despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus who were fleeing Jerusalem, their dreams and their future shattered by the death of Christ. Three factors changed their minds and reversed their footsteps – their understanding of the scriptures, their recognition of Christ in the breaking of the bread and their acceptance of the resurrection. All three graces are ours in abundance enabling us to strengthen our faith, engage the world, preach the good news, provide priests for our altars and religious for our apostolates, empower the laity, take care of the poor. Anything less would be an act of betrayal of the Savior who mandated us to “make disciples of all nations” and who guaranteed his support and his presence among us until the end of time.

By fast-forwarding to the Ascension the two disciples of Emmaus are replaced by two others, dressed in white, who counsel the perplexed apostles that there is work to be done. “Why are you standing here looking into the sky?” “Jesus, who has been taken up from you will come again.” The message for us two millennia later is still the same. No more stargazing. God’s work is still to be done. Cardinal Hickey would not want it any other way.

AMEN