

Reflection/Homily

Maiville, Cork

12 August 2018

Isaiah 12: 1-5, Eph. 3: 14-21, Mt. 25: 31-32a, 34-40

We gather today in Maiville to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Brothers Roy Kennedy & Ultan Rohan and the Diamond Jubilee of Brothers Denis Sheahan & Michael McKeown. We give thanks for the fidelity and loyalty to God over the years that these men have given through the Presentation Brothers.

Jubilee celebrations are special occasions. We acknowledge the commitment that these Brothers have given to the service of youth and disadvantaged people during the past 50 years and 60 years, respectively. They are giving a life of dedication and service to God; we celebrate this today. We rejoice with the sentiments expressed in Isaiah: “that day, you will say, give thanks to Yahweh; call his name aloud. Proclaim the deeds of Yahweh to the people; declare his name sublime. Sing of Yahweh, for Yahweh has done marvellous things; let them be known to the whole world”.

While preparing this reflection, I reflected back on the 60s and 70s in Ireland: the country was changing, the Troubles in the North of Ireland were starting to dominate the national airwaves, Jack Lynch was the Taoiseach from 1966 to 1973. France and Wales were the powerhouses of international rugby and history was made when Munster beat the All Blacks in 1978. Wexford beat Tipperary in the 1968 All-Ireland Hurling Final and Down beat Kerry in the All-Ireland Football Final. Each one of us here will have our own memories.

It is against this background of a changing Ireland that Roy and Ultan were preparing to take vows and embark on the journey that has lasted for the past 50 years. I asked myself, “Why did these men travel this road of a vocation with the Presentation Brothers?” It was, I believe, your enthusiasm, your passion for Christ and a strong desire to serve him. You believed that you could make a difference in the lives of those you have encountered over the past 50 years either in the classroom or on the margins.

In 2014 Pope Francis launched the Year of Consecrated Life and he marvelled that his own call of vocation was “a call of love”. And that is what happened to you. Christ looked at you and you said, “Yes”. Yes, to a call to love. You did not have to wait to come to Religious Life to learn about love, community, faith, generosity or concern for those in need; you had already imbibed these traits from your family and the larger community that you grew up in. They

nurtured you, supported you in your vocation and the journey you took in 1968 when you made First Profession. Today you have just renewing your vows with your confreres.

What wonderful lives of presence, witness and service you have given at home and aboard! You adapted to the changing circumstance as you grew through fragility, engaged with diversity and were truly Brothers in Christ to the people you lived and worked among.

I remember my first encounter as a student with Brother Roy at Presentation College Primary School in Cork. It was Roy was who gave us our first taste of rugby through the Kiely Cup; these games became a battleground since the winning team then had bragging rights for the year. Roy embarked on a journey 20 odd years ago which saw him leave the shores of Cork and take on a project that became known as the HOUSE OF MERCY in Gravesend, Kent, England. This project had small beginnings but to date the project has now got three houses that accommodate those who are homeless or, because of other circumstances, have no place to sleep. The latest house will be opened at the end of this year and will be called the Edmund Rice House.

Ultan, you have dedicated your life to the service of “forming Christ in the young”. You have worked with those on the margins and have guided them with the care and compassion we all know and love in you. We all remember your renowned prowess on the hurling field. I am not sure if the opposition would say the same!

St. Paul reminds us in today’s Reading that God accomplishes all this in us as he “strengthens us inwardly with power through the work of the Spirit. Glory to God, whose power, now at work in us, can do immensely more than we can ask for or imagine.”

Our Jubilarians today have a combined total of 220 years of service in religious life as Presentation Brothers. They have been members of different communities both at home and abroad; they have influenced the lives of thousands of students and individuals whom they have encountered over their years as Brothers. None of us will fully understand the full extent of the service that these four Brothers have given to those they have befriended, counselled, shown compassion, helped to find a way where there appeared to be none. These ordinary or simple things will have made a world of difference to many whom you have met over the past 50/60 years. Each of you has given true witness to Brotherhood and to the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice – we can

only guess how many individuals or groups have been enriched by your generosity of heart, your compassion and your care.

When we look at today's Gospel, I believe it speaks volumes to the Jubilarians, "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was stranger and you entertained me; naked and you clothed me; sick and you looked after me; in prison and you visited me...I assure you, insofar as you did it to one of the least of my brothers & sisters, you did it to me." Brothers, you have lived out this Gospel passage over your lifetime as a Presentation Brother. I do not need to elaborate, but each one of us here celebrating with you knows and acknowledges your living out of this Gospel passage.

Roy & Ultan, Denis & Michael, as we celebrate the Jubilees of your Religious Profession today, we thank God for inviting you to live the consecrated life of Presentation Brothers. We remember your parents for encouraging you to follow the call and support you as you all said 'yes' to God's invitation. We rejoice with you today and please be assured of our prayers as we all continue the journey with you. May we all be inspired by the vision and mission of Blessed Edmund Rice.