CAFOD's 50th Anniversary Mass in Westminster Cathedral.

Bishop John Arnold’s Homily.

Well, I wonder what Jacquie Stuyt, Elspeth Orchard, Evelyn White and Nora Warmington would make of this gathering in the Cathedral today? They were, of course, the four ladies who - in 1958 - began to organise the first Family Fast Day, which took place in 1960. It exceeded all expectations, so much so that in 1962 the bishops of England and Wales used their project as the foundation for the new Catholic Fund for Overseas Development – CAFOD – which was brought to life in 1962 at the meeting of the bishops in Rome, at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council.

These ladies were members of The National Board of Catholic Women, Catholic Women’s League, Union of Catholic Mothers and World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations.

What would these ladies have thought of this celebration of the 50th Anniversary of CAFOD?

My first thought was that they would be delighted and astonished. But, a second thought was that they might not be that surprised at all. After all, here were four rather feisty and determined ladies who knew what initiative was and had an eye for innovation. They committed their own considerable energies to the project and gathered others to help them. They might well have expected us to apply the same amount of energy and imagination in its on-going development. While they might not have foreseen the direction of all this growth, they would have expected new ideas and initiatives.

CAFOD’s budget for this year is set at £58m. This is made possible because of such generous contributions coming, for the most part, but by no means exclusively, from the Catholic community, allowing for projects with partners in local groups and communities, for some of the poorest and most disenfranchised people in the world, in projects established with partners in 46 countries in “The Global South”.

And, of course, our whole understanding of ‘charity’ and ‘giving’ has changed. I remember, so clearly, as a young boy at school, that we gave our pocket money, perhaps not always as cheerfully and generously as I would like to remember, to ‘The Missions’. We understood that this was to provide food and medicine for the poorest people, usually to Africa.

This, of course, is a vital first step. In times of humanitarian disaster people must have food to survive and medicines to protect them from illnesses that ravage famine areas.

But real development, we now understand, goes much further. It lies in allowing people their innate dignity and well-being. It means allowing people to create their own sustainable livelihoods; Giving people a voice so that governments may be called to account for their policies and their actions, both in their domestic and foreign affairs and allowing for the exposure of what can be the ruthless pillaging of natural resources by multi-nationals with no thought of benefit for the people of a region - so often the root causes of poverty. To promote development CAFOD has to develop its own expertise in so many of these areas such as, Livelihoods, Healthcare, HIV/AIDS, food and nutrition, Advocacy, the Environment and Climate Change.
It has been my privilege in my five years as a Trustee of CAFOD, to see its work with partners, making a difference.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo I have met with groups of women survivors of sexual violence, all too often a weapon of modern warfare, secure in a community and running a thriving business as tailors and dress-makers for their wider community. In Rwanda, I have seen families orphaned in the genocide, growing with a sense of self-determination in their communities.

In Uganda I have seen farmers - after 23 years of military incursions by The Lord's Resistance Army – returning to their land, not only able to feed themselves but with surplus crops to trade in their local markets.

In East Timor – after a war of independence - a fast growing cooperative run by women who supply local tourist hotels with cooked fruits and preserves which provides them with money for the education of their children, and a blacksmith’s cooperative where men were not only producing farming tools and equipment but also providing training for local farmers in their use.

And there was a wonderful day in Sri Lanka spent handing out door keys to new homes for people who had lost everything in the tsunami.

The key in all this is the work in partnership with local people, local communities - working to bring about change together.

While I have had the privilege of seeing all these projects, it is so important that CAFOD spends time and energy providing information, education and communication with the people here who are so generous, to show them what can be achieved. The Catholic community in England and Wales have been spectacular in their giving, year on year, and more so during times of drought, earthquake and tsunami. In so many schools and parishes, CAFOD is a familiar word and its work well-known and appreciated. Over 90% of our parishes take part in Family Fast Days. There are hundreds of school projects directed at Cafod projects. And what of the thousands who have campaigned with CAFOD to change the world's unjust trading systems, for debt cancellation of poor countries, for establishing that vital 0.7% of GDP of Government spending on development each year.

Where is the Gospel in all this? We heard in the Gospel today that two companions were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Things for them, it seemed, were disastrous. Everything that they thought was about to happen when Jesus had so triumphantly arrived in Jerusalem just a week before was not now going to happen. He had been arrested, suffered under a miscarriage of justice and been put to death. The mission, with all its hopes and promises, was over. But it was precisely in that moment of desolation that, unrecognised by them, the Risen Lord was walking with them..... explaining the scriptures to them, providing understanding, giving new hope. Our world faces a continuing toll of humanitarian disasters but the Lord walks with us, too, and there can never be the moment of despair.

St Paul presents us with some wonderful images for our lives together in Faith. One of the most powerful must be that of the human body made up of so many parts, all those parts though many, make one body. Paul has the utter conviction that we form one human family. When one part of the body is sick, the whole body is unwell. Those who live in comfort, with security and plenty, are part
of one and the same body with those who are dying of hunger and the relentless suffering of poverty. CAFOD speaks of 'Just One World', a recognition that we belong to one another.

The work of CAFOD is founded on the Gospel, from which are drawn the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. CAFOD's work with partners is based on those core values of Compassion, Dignity, Hope, Partnership, Solidarity, Sustainability and Stewardship. These principles guide and give shape to CAFOD's work. These are the same principles that guide Caritas International, which now has 154 member organisations throughout the world, which when it pools its resources is second in size only to the International Red Cross.

And we welcome today many representatives of sister Caritas agencies across Europe.

I think that we have two clear purposes here today. The first is thanksgiving. That begins with our four ladies who felt moved to take action against poverty, Archbishop Worlock, then Mgr Worlock who brought the CAFOD charity into reality, Bishop Grant (the first Chair of CAFOD) and Bishop Tony Hitchen. But then we need to remember each and every person who has contributed to, or worked for, CAFOD over those 50 years and who have helped to make it all that it is today. That makes it so clearly a celebration of thanksgiving for the whole Catholic community; schools. Parishes, religious communities and organisations.

We must be sure to thank also those many people who, beyond our Catholic family, have felt enthused by what they see in CAFOD, many of whom have been extraordinarily generous in giving time, expertise and money.

The second purpose must be one of entrusting the future to God's goodness. Although so much has been achieved we can never be complacent. There remains much to be done. One billion people still live in abject poverty.

For CAFOD to succeed, for Justice to be done, starvation and disease and poverty annihilated from our world then it will come through our hope and the conviction that Isaiah speaks of in that first reading:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
For the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
To bind up hearts that are broken.

That means God working through you and me. I close with a reference to another image given by St Paul. While New Testament writers speak of Christians as disciples and even Apostles, there is only St Paul who elevates us to being 'Ambassadors of Christ'. You and I are called to represent Christ and to carry on the work of Christ. We are to bring the good news to the poor. The challenge is enormous but, being parts of one body, each of us has our own role to play. And being part of the one body we must be careful to ensure that all the body is healthy and well. And our energy, purpose and ultimate progress must rest on hope.
So, as we give thanks for the fifty year past, and commit ourselves to the next 50 years, let our every effort, decision and intention be made in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.