

SERVICE FOR THE CONFERRAL OF THE PAPAL KNIGHTHOOD
TO MR ALBERTY GUBAY
ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH
ONCHAN
WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2011.

1. It is such a joy for us all to be gathered here today. The occasion is splendid, for we want so much to express our thanks and esteem to Albert, Carmel and all family and friends. The occasion is beautiful as we enjoy the setting of this lovely church, itself a tribute to Albert's generosity and to his capacity for hard physical work.

Archbishop Kelly very much wanted to be here. He wrote a letter to Albert, and sent a copy to me. I would like to quote from it. He expresses his joy that Albert is being honoured by this award from Pope Benedict and then speaks of this window:

‘Whenever I recall Christ walking on the waters of Douglas Bay, I find myself recalling the lines from a poem by Francis Thompson:

“And Lo!
Christ walking on the waters,
Not of Gennesareth,
But Thames.”

‘Today’, he writes, ‘you are surrounded by beauty as thanksgiving for beautiful service to our Lord is celebrated.’

2 In the reading we have heard, St Paul encourages us to be active and generous in playing our part, our different parts, in the ‘life of the Body’.

He reminds us that we do indeed belong to one another, and that our well-being genuinely depends on each other. Now we must be clear that when he speaks about the ‘Body’ St Paul does not simply mean the body of believers – although he certainly does mean that – but also the wider society to which the Body of believers is to be an example and a servant. Our work, our use of talents, is to be for the good of all.

3. In this St Paul is very down to earth. Not for him some abstract or over spiritual idea of religion, or the Church. We are to be genuinely at the service of others, of those in need, of strangers, using our skills and compassion for the good of all.

4. St Paul's opening words are remarkable. He tells us: ‘Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.’ You cannot get much more down to earth than that. What God is interested in is not so much our thoughts, our grand ideas, even our dreams, but what we do, what we do with our hands, our strength, our bodies – all our daily work. Yet he tells us that this very stuff of daily life is to be ‘transformed’ by our ‘discerning what is the will of God.’ It is the vision of faith – of Christ on the waters, of Douglas Bay, of the Thames, of Christ in every office, building site and board room – that changes what we do into something of eternal value.

5. I think we all know something of Albert's early prayer, as he was starting out as an entrepreneur – though that might not have been the word he used! But it was a

transforming prayer, one that gave a far deeper purpose to everything that he consequently achieved and goes on achieving. In everything he does, there is God's purpose to be kept in mind. That is remarkable and, in some ways, quite astonishing in today's world. But St Paul tells us: 'Do not be conformed to this world.'

6. I believe there is one truth underlying so much of our experience in life that points to way to 'God's purpose'. It is this. Most of what we really cherish, what really makes life so precious, comes to us as a gift. It is the gift of friendship, of companionship, of the thrill of shared enterprise, of the beauty of our world and of our creativity. It is, in the end, the gift of love.

This giftedness of life, this inward generosity of so much, this gratuity, is the finest signpost to God's continuing and all-pervasive presence in our world. Our response, if we are truly sensitive, is to be generous in return: generous to those we love, to our family and friends, to those in need, to our society and, ultimately, open-heartedly generous to God in the praise and service we offer.

7. Albert, your generosity – thoughtful, intelligent, measured yet seemingly boundless – is a great sign of the generosity of God. This is so because you make it clear that you expect no public acclaim, no list of honours, no fanfare of trumpets. You are generous because God is first generous to you. And that is your great lesson to us all today.

Like Archbishop Kelly, I am so honoured to be able to convey to you today this award which comes from His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Everyone here today treasures the thrilling memories of his recent visit to the UK. I'm only sorry that his programme could not include the Isle of Man! This is a rare award, yet entirely appropriate for yours is a rare generosity, one that will continue to benefit the efforts in the service of others not only of the Catholic Church but of many other beneficiaries, for many, many years to come.

Albert, it is with great pleasure I ask you to come forward to receive this Papal Award of Knight Commander with Star in the Order of Saint Gregory the Great.

+Vincent Nichols