

Mass for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Independence of Slovenia

Introduction and Homily of the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster  
Westminster Cathedral, 25 June 2011.

## INTRODUCTION

I welcome you all to this Cathedral of the Most Precious Blood for this Mass of Thanksgiving on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Independence of Slovenia. I am very conscious of the Mass celebrated yesterday in the Cathedral in Ljubljana. These two occasions unite us in a single prayer to our Heavenly Father.

I welcome this morning His Excellency Iztok Jarc (YARTS) and Madame Jarc, the Ambassador of Slovenia, together with ambassadors and other embassy representatives from 10 different countries. In particular I welcome Mgr Vincent Brady, representing His Excellency Archbishop Mennini, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See.

I also welcome most warmly Bishop Jamnik, from Ljubljana  
I wish to mention, among other distinguished guests, members of the British- Slovene Society, with Mr Keith Miles, its Chairman and Mrs Miles, who have done so much to prepare for this occasion.

Today I also record messages of best wishes from HRH The Prince of Wales, from Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, from Lord Carey, for Archbishop of Canterbury and from Archbishop Peter Smith, the Archbishop of Southwark.

I thank you all for your presence and invite you to join in this prayer of thanksgiving to God for a courageous people, and to ask God's blessing on their future.

## HOMILY

In writing his Gospel, St John the Evangelist chose his words very carefully. So we have to listen to them carefully, too. For example, in the passage we have just heard, St John uses the term 'the world'. He uses it to denote all that is opposed to the Gospel, to Jesus' own presence on earth. Jesus tells us not to belong to the world. He tells his disciples that 'his choice' of them as his disciples has withdrawn them from the world. He tells them to expect persecution and opposition. Indeed, he goes as far as to say that the world hates him, and therefore, hates God our Father. The world is, indeed, a sinful place.

Yet there is another meaning that St John gives to the term 'the world'. He speaks of God's love for the world, such that he sent his only Son. He speaks of sending his disciples into the world. The world is the object of the unending, unquenchable love of God. Indeed, the first meaning of the term 'the world' is that it refers to the whole

of God's good creation: his creatures whom he loves, to whom he will give himself completely.

If that is the first meaning of the term, then it is its second meaning which we have heard in our passage this morning, the human world as it has evolved in history: with corruption, lies and violence having become, in a way, 'natural' to it. In this way a second world has almost supplanted the first – creating what some philosophers speak of as a state of 'inauthenticity' or even of 'alienation'.

This tension, between these two meanings of the term 'the world', is well within the experience of each of us. In our own lives we know the struggle between them: our best of motives and actions are so often corroded into something less good, less beautiful than we intended. Our hopes are often dashed on our own lack of integrity, and that of others. We are stretched between what we really want – all that is true, and good and beautiful – the world of God's good creation – and the reality which we face, both within us and around us.

The personal story of the life of each of us, then, becomes a patchwork of light and dark. There are days and times when we do indeed seem to catch the light of God's goodness, living in the reassuring experience of his love, so often mediated to us by others, in our prayer and in our faith, expressed in the practices of our religion. At other times all is cloudy and oppressive. Then we struggle, seemingly in the dark, more intensely aware of the presence of the burdens of the day, of being let down, of struggling against the odds and of being filled with a sense of helplessness.

Thus, too, is the story of a nation. Today you, far more than I, will be conscious of the story of the Slovenes, for this is your nation, your identity as a people and this history forms you: in your sense of pride and in your sense of shame, in your religious practices and failings, in your political endeavours and wider relationships. This nation knows itself, as does every nation, to be part of the God's created world in its goodness as well as being part of the world which, at times, turns its back on the one true God with all the consequences that follow.

Today we pray especially for the Catholic Church in Slovenia. We recall its history, stretching back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, with its great patrons in Cyril and Methodius, the Diocese of Ljubljana founded in 1461, promoted to an Archdiocese in 1961, rich in history, in suffering and in martyrs.

Today we do well to recall the struggles and persecution faced by the Church in the period after the Second World War: 234 priests arrested and jailed; 123 killed in the revolution; many forced out of the country; property nationalised, religious instruction banned from schools and Church schools closed altogether. We thank God for the new opportunities of the present period, since the formation of the Republic of Slovenia, despite the uncertainties in the economic, legal and political situation the Church finds itself in today. We pray that, on the basis of heroic witnesses of the past, the Church can grow and strengthen in the years ahead.

We offer this prayer so that God may be truly worshipped and proclaimed within this nation. This, we know, is so important for its own well-being. History shows us that when a people forget God, or turn their back on the reality of God, then sooner or

later it is its people who suffer. Searching for the truth of God means always respecting the truth about the human person. Ignoring or banishing the search for the truth of God, means caring nought for the truth about the human person and reducing that person to something less than he and she truly is. Without God, the person becomes an object of state control, a unit of economic effort, an item on the balance sheet of care, a voter whose support is to be obtained and manipulated. But every human being is more than that, and it is the mission of the Church to be constantly proclaiming the true God-given dignity of each person as the sole reliable basis for social well-being.

This the Church does in its teaching, for which there must be a legitimate space and opportunity. This the Church does in its liturgy and worship, which unites it to the universal prayer of the whole Church world-wide and through which a nation takes its place in the great family of faith. The Church also serves the nation in its charitable activities, in the principles and faith embodied in those activities, which become an authentic witness to the truth of our life on earth, to the values which lie at the foundation of an authentic and harmonious society.

Today's anniversary is a moment to recall that event 20 years ago when the Republic of Slovenia officially declared its independence. A cessation of hostilities with the Yugoslav Army followed. Step by step the nation has found its feet: its constitution adopted, recognition from around the world – first of all by the Holy See; membership of the United Nations, of Nato, and of the European Union.

Today we pray: may God bless Slovenia, its people, their faith, and, in a special way, the Catholic Church in that land. May today echo with the ancient appeal of the Prophet Ezekiel: 'You shall be my people and I will be your God.' Amen.