

## MASS OF THE SACRED HEART

### 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRIESTLY ORDINATION OF POPE BENEDICT

30 JUNE 2011

On this Feast of the Sacred Heart, we give thanks to God for the 60 years of priestly ministry of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI. We do so in union with the Church throughout the world, as we celebrate this Mass with the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Mennini, the Holy Father's personal representative here in Great Britain.

In offering this Mass for the Holy Father we are still full of the memories of his remarkable State Visit to the United Kingdom, last September. The sights and messages of that Visit inspire our lives as Catholics and our sense of mission in this country. Indeed, Pope Benedict called on us to find our place in our society and to bring forward our Christian Gospel with

courage and sensitivity. He urged us, by his example, to appreciate all that is good in our culture and history, to enter into reasoned dialogue and conversation and to cooperate in the promotion of sound and good values and work. At the same time, he called us to do this on the foundation of the holiness of our lives. He eloquently invited young people to give God a central place in their hearts, to be attentive to the vocation, the unique calling that God has for each person and to be ready to respond with generosity and love for the Lord.

The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holy Father's priesthood underlines how what he asks of us is what he puts into practice in his own remarkable life. We congratulate him today and promise him our prayers and our own effort to be faithful ourselves to all that the Lord asks of us.

This Mass is the first Mass of the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As the readings of our Mass this evening make plain, in contemplating the Sacred Heart of Jesus we come face to face with the fullness of God's love for us. Pope Benedict himself said on this Feast day last year: 'In this Liturgy we peer, as it were, into the heart of Jesus opened in death by the spear of the Roman soldier. Jesus' heart was indeed opened for us and before us – and thus God's own heart was opened.'

The pierced heart of Jesus is a summing up of God's unending love and compassion for His people. In Jesus, in this pierced heart, we see the unquestionable fulfilment of the words that 'He loved them to the end.' Thus it is that God, who knows our ways, our failings, our needs, our weaknesses, never turns away from us. Rather He is constantly with us – our Good Shepherd

to the end – guiding and teaching us always.

The pierced heart of Jesus flows with blood and water. Once it is opened it becomes a fountain, with the water and the blood recalling the two fundamental sacraments by which the Church lives: Baptism and Eucharist. These are the crucial means by which God's constant and transforming presence comes into our lives, changing our hearts into the dwelling place of God himself.

These two aspects of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are so closely connected with the ministry of the ordained priest. So close is this connection that the Cure of Ars could say: 'Priesthood is the love of the Sacred Heart.'

The good priest knows his people; he accompanies them through all the pathways of life – in birth, in death; in

youth, in old age; in health, in sickness; in the joy of love and goodness, in the sorrow and burden of sin and guilt. In this way the good priest is a living, tangible expression of God's abiding love and presence in our lives.

The good priest also provides the Sacraments of the Church, in particular bringing words of absolution to those troubled by sin, words of anointing to those who are suffering and, of course, words by which the bread and wine become for us the Body and Blood of Christ, the food of our eternal life.

For these reasons, people love their priests. As one priest told me recently, only when he was living through a period of serious illness did he come to realise how much his people loved him. This is such a gift and an encouragement to us priests – and bishops. And people love the

Holy Father, too, in his priesthood, in his ministry as the Successor of Peter. When Pope Benedict was here in London, there were no empty pavements as some had predicted. We flocked to show him our love, our support, our deep affectionate respect and loyalty. And I know that he was moved and strengthened by all that we gave to him.

So today, as we hold before our eyes the loving, Sacred Heart of our Saviour, we pray for Pope Benedict that the Lord will bless him, keep him in his care and guide him in his leadership of the Church.

I also ask you to pray for the four men who will be ordained to the priesthood here in the Cathedral on Saturday, that they too will be filled with the same love of Christ, the same spirit of sacrifice and consecration.

And pray too for all the priests of this Diocese, on this day set aside as a Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. May we all, together with our new Bishop-Elect, be faithful servants of our Master, spending our effort to be with our people, in love and truth, generously celebrating the mysteries of Faith with them.

Let us all daily contemplate the Sacred Heart of Jesus and make room in our hearts for his saving words: ‘Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.’ Amen

✠Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster