

## **Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School**

### **Speech Day Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Mr. Chairman, Headmaster, ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be here with you this evening and thank you for the opportunity to present the prizes at Speech day. I am honoured to address you as we celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School. I would like to echo the words quoted by the Headmaster from Cardinal Vincent Nichol's homily at the Centenary Mass and thank the Governing Body, the Headmaster, and the staff for the many ways in which you make this an outstanding school with a strong Catholic identity.

I congratulate those of you who have been awarded prizes. I hope that you will continue to develop your God-given gifts with wisdom and insight for the good of others and the common good of our society. As Mr. Stubbings writes on the school website, "we see our principal role, as a Catholic school, to be a seed ground for the apostolic mission of the Church. The School aims, through the provision of a Catholic ethos and of sound Catholic teaching, to prepare our pupils to undertake their responsibilities as Catholics in society."

By developing your gifts to their fullness you will begin to know more deeply God's call for you and the 'definite service' by which you will fulfil your part in the mission of the Church. This has already begun through the ways in which you live the school motto *Amare et Servire* in your families, in the school and beyond its gates.

The Headmaster spoke of the way in which the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School in 1914 welcomed Belgian refugees who were fleeing from their country after the German invasion. Today you reach out to others in many ways, especially through your school links with a school on the Sudanese, Eritrean border and your work with HCPT.

During the next year, in the prayerful time between the two synods, Pope Francis invites the Church into a profound spiritual reflection on the call, journey and mission of the family. It is in the family that the foundations for social living and the living of Catholic faith are laid and built upon. He writes,

"Within the family are joys and trials, deep love and relationships which, at times, can be wounded. The family is truly the "school of humanity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52), which is much needed today... The family is uniquely important to the Church and in these times, when all

believers are invited to think of others rather than themselves, the family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization.”<sup>1</sup>

The love and joy which families experience is good news to be shared with others. The struggles and the anxieties are ways in which we are called to bear our burdens together and so witness to our trust in God.

As members of this school you are called to witness through the power of the Holy Spirit to the gospel of Jesus Christ and be his ‘missionary disciples’. We all know that actions speak louder than words. In preparation for your future responsibilities as Catholics in society, the school provides the opportunity to reach out to others in service and love and helps you develop your “Catholic voices” by growing in the wisdom of God’s ways through prayer, study and learning.

This is surely an appropriate legacy to Cardinal Vaughan who was passionate about education and the spread of the gospel. As the founder of the Mill Hill Missionaries and St. Joseph’s College, he needed to travel widely in the Americas and was away for more than 18 months raising a sum of £11,000, which enabled him to buy a property in Mill Hill. Funding of Catholic education is still a challenge! He would have questioned whether a memorial to his legacy should be erected, knowing that a servant is called only to do his duty. However, everyone at the time agreed that a memorial would have to be practical and serve needs. This school was the ideal solution. He would have wanted his students to be missionary disciples of Christ.

Four years after the foundation of the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, Cardinal Bourne sought to include Catholic social teaching in the school curriculum<sup>2</sup> and was actively promoting and encouraging the work of the Catholic Social Guild (founded 1909) so that the laity would become more aware of the foundations from which they could live their working lives. He wrote, “The social apostolate must be in very large measure a lay apostolate. The duty lies alike upon the Catholic worker and the Catholic employer; no intelligent Catholic is without responsibility in the matter.”<sup>3</sup> Since that date, the *corpus* of Catholic social teaching has developed and been enriched by many contributions from the Popes. The education of

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<sup>1</sup><http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2014/10/18/0770/03044.html> 2

<sup>2</sup> Vickers, *By the Thames Divided* 447.

<sup>3</sup> Vickers, 449.

conscience in the light of the Church's social teaching is ever more crucial as many people face an employment which is precarious, or have lost their jobs with dire consequences for their families; as many young people seek their first job and dignified work, and many people are forced to work with 'zero-hour contracts' and experience work as a place of fragile existence.

In a recent address to accountants Pope Francis said,

“And so, everyone – especially those who are in a profession that deals with the proper functioning of the economic life of a country – are called to play a positive, constructive role in the day-to-day development of their own work, knowing that behind every identity card there is a story, there are many faces. In such work... the Christian professional every day draws, from prayer and from the Word of God, the strength first of all to do their own work well, with competence and wisdom; and then “to go beyond,” which means going to meet the person in difficulty; to exercise that creativity that allows you to find solutions for difficult situations; to value reasons of human dignity in the face of bureaucratic rigidity.”<sup>4</sup>

Behind every identity card there is a story, there are many faces, there is a family. The face of the other invites a response into the mystery of the other person who is an equal and a gift of God.

The response invited by the school motto, “*Amare et Servire*” is to be attentive, to welcome the face of the other person standing in front of you, to invite a response through the gaze of love and to serve the needs of the other. We can describe this as the work of mercy. Mercy can be translated from the Latin *miser cordia* as meaning ‘having a heart for the poor’.

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has spoken about the Church as the Church of Mercy. He likens the Church to a field hospital for the wounded. An aspect of the identity and mission of the Catholic school is that it will provide its pupils with an education in divine and human mercy.

God reveals himself as a God of mercy. He says to Moses, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to

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<sup>4</sup>[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/14/pope\\_to\\_accountants\\_work\\_for\\_a\\_globalization\\_of\\_solidarity/1111144](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/14/pope_to_accountants_work_for_a_globalization_of_solidarity/1111144)

bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Ex 3:7-8).

On Mount Horeb, God reveals himself again as a God of mercy and fidelity: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). Cardinal Walter Kasper in his book entitled *Mercy, The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* writes, “The most important expression for understanding mercy is *hesed*, which means unmerited loving, kindness, friendliness, favour, and also divine grace and mercy.” This rich word goes beyond “mere emotion and grief at human deprivation; it means God’s free and gracious turning toward the human person with care.” It characterises a relationship, an ongoing attitude and a posture.<sup>5</sup>

Two parables develop this understanding of mercy; the first revealing the divine mercy of God, the second the ways of mercy which we are called to imitate.

In the parable of the Merciful Father, the father who has given half of his wealth freely and lovingly to his youngest son awaits his return. His love for his son meant that he must give him his freedom since love always demands freedom. He must let him go and become an adult. How long that takes! How often he must have looked out and wondered if his son would return. The father waits faithfully hoping for his return so that he can welcome him home with abundant and generous mercy. We can trust in God’s faithful love.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan has compassion for the man who has been robbed and is lying on the ground. He stoops low and gets down onto the ground so that he can look into the face of the man and see whether there is any life in his eyes. He then “bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him.” This wonderful parable capturing *Amare et Servire* reveals the meaning of mercy; it begins in the heart with compassion and ends in practical action towards the one in need.

An education in mercy places the focus on the person we encounter, his or her face, and the engagement which is invited. Extending the image used earlier by Pope Francis; whether you will be a top barrister, a teacher, or whatever you become, your faith invites you to look upon others with a gaze of mercy and see their dignity as persons so that you always seek their good. The welfare of persons has priority over your economic or financial success. The

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<sup>5</sup> Kasper, 43.

framework of Catholic social teaching gives you the foundations for a growth in wisdom which will inform the decisions you make always bearing in mind the common good of all.

An education in mercy invites you to extend the gaze of love to those in real need in our world. The images of the Cardinal's recent celebration of Mass in Gaza City show the suffering and poverty of the people. Mercy invites you to see as God sees and then act as the Good Samaritan helped the man in need. This education always opens our eyes to new horizons and invites us to look beyond ourselves.

In the final blessing of the Rite of Marriage, we are reminded that the family is called to look beyond itself. Part of this blessing is appropriate this evening as we reflect on how an education in mercy is part of the mission of this school whose members are called to love and serve:

May you always bear witness to the love of God in the world so that the afflicted and the needy will find in you generous friends, and welcome you into the joys of heaven.

Bishop John Sherrington

Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster