

Homily **23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C** (8.9.19)

Father Simon Lodge, who I'm going to work for in St. Patrick's, Huddersfield, when he said goodbye to his parish in Pontefract, he did a normal sermon and left it to the very end to say a few words of goodbye. I'm not going to do that, because I want much more attention.

[laughter]

Now, I was briefly thinking what to say and the first thing that intrigued me was some maybe meaningless statistics, because I was just interested myself with the nine years five months I've been here. So I was looking through the various books, I can't tell you holy communions, 'cause we don't record them, but sick calls to people seriously ill or calling on people who have got a grave illness and anointing them, I was surprised to learn I had 119 in the book. Marriages, and that includes weddings, but also marriages that need to be put right if they were contracted wrong and so on, I was flabbergasted to see I've done 62 in the nine years. Funerals 234. And baptisms, if I include the three after this mass, 438.

And I remember reading about Pope Pius XII preaching in the 1950's to newly ordained priests, and he said,

**"Whenever you celebrate a baptism, all your priesthood, celebrate it as if it was your first with joy, because it's often that couple's first child."**

And I've tried to practice that principle in all my priesthood to every aspect of parish life celebrations.

And I was thinking what am I proud of, besides the people I've served, and I'll come to that in a minute, things I can be proud of really, things that I hate doing really. So, for example, take the care of buildings. I loathe that job. It will be one of the beautiful things I'll be glad to shed in ceasing to be a parish priest. And I've had to do loads of maintenance and repair work, that it felt like I've done it myself, but the amount of time you have to stay in for builders and all sorts. But I'm very proud of the fact that we rescued the hall and the Smith brothers and father who did it, made it into a secure facility for at least another 25 years, I would suggest. But the diocese, when approached, wanted to knock it down, because they said,

**"You can hire a hall when you need it."**

Well, you know how fatal that is to remove the hub of a social centre from the same site, so with a bit of magic and wizardry we got the job done [laughter]. No, not true. We managed to raise the money to do that. And the Undercroft, I'm very proud of creating that wonderful meeting room, which many of the groups use. There's all the everyday maintenance.

And then school/ parish links, I have made an effort with some initiatives, which I'm pleased about. Special and seasonal services I've done with the school additional to what they were used to. And myself and Mr. Farmer and Helen Edwards for several years on the run took small groups of year 6 for

three sessions each to try and develop their prayer life before they moved on to the secondary school.

So with the help of others, I've tried to initiate and be involved in new things. And that includes parish development. The catechetical work of this parish is tremendous with communions and confirmation. And the catechists have adjusted themselves to all these different programmes that have come out and have done a wonderful job.

But I've also been pleased to say I've done courses for readers, Eucharistic ministers, Lenten courses, and spirituality and liturgical innovations. So I'm leaving something for my successor to build on.

And I hope, as that second reading said about Onesimus,

**"I hope you welcome him as you would welcome me",**

as you did welcome me when I first came here. You know, they always say if you're being moved, make sure you're going to a place where the priest before you was hated [laughter], because you're on a winner. So I had it rough following Father Michael, having to follow such a high standard. But I was very pleased to follow Father Michael. And Father Peter may have it difficult, which I hope he doesn't, following me, although I can say a statistic I did leave out. I know at least three people who have stopped coming to this church because of me. So you can't please everyone, can you?

[laughter]

Above all else, though, what's going to be memorable for me is people and the involvement of people and the support of people and the care of people and the enriching that people have given me in so many situations. And this is the only church, I can honestly say, where I've seen so many young families and youngsters get involved. I'm very proud of our young people. And the way, obviously, some of the other parishioners work with them, like the Youth SVP, and then you get the World Challenge Group very year, don't you, our young people going on the World Challenge and raising money by selling cakes, to which I think they're greatly amazed at the support they get from you and we're amazed by their commitment.

But I'm very proud of the servers, most of whom I've trained. I think the servers have given a great commitment. Most of the ones that are currently on the altar I've trained. And I don't mean just now, I mean all the masses, because I think they've given great dedication and wonderful service and served with great dignity and enrich our liturgy.

I remember my first sermon here, the first weekend I was here, I'm going to end on this. I told you at the time that I had struggled with a very serious cancer, and that it was always in danger of coming back. And I said,

**"So maybe the bishop had sent me to Pudsey to misquote the motto of, 'See Pudsey [not Venice] and die.'" [laughter]**

Well, if I get to Tuesday and don't drop dead, I will leave Pudsey before I die. But when the bishop asked me if I'd take this appointment in Huddersfield, I

don't think he realised quite what he was saying when he finished and stared me in the eye and said,

**"You do realise, Richard, this will be your last appointment."** [laughter]

Think about it. It's been a delight being with you, and I want it to end on a joyful note, not a sad note. Thank you.

[applause]