



RIGHT REVEREND JOHN ARNOLD

Homily at the Solemn Mass of
Installation as Bishop of Salford
8th December 2014

My brothers and sisters, we've just heard a very familiar passage from the Gospel of Saint Luke, the Annunciation of the Lord. It's one of those moments in Scripture where God bursts into human experience and human history to move the history of salvation forward, through the message of an angel. Now we can speculate on exactly how Mary felt: deeply troubled, but serene; deeply troubled, but bewildered, anxious, who knows? But the point is she said "Let God's will be done."

Now we might find ourselves thinking that scene belongs to Scripture; it's two thousand years ago, and it's just not part of human experience. I beg to differ. I think God has that unconditional love for each and every one of us. He knows us so well: he created us, he's given us our gifts, he has his Divine providence working in us each and every day. Trouble is, we don't have the archangel to come and tell us what God's will is quite so directly. We need to discern what God's will is as we go along each day. Now, how are we going to do that?

I go straight back to an image that Saint Paul uses so frequently in his letters: "Just as a human body, though made up of many parts, all those parts, though many, make up one body, and so it is with Christ." Saint Paul's brilliant insight into what the Church needs to be. Made up of individuals with their gifts and their talents which he has given to us, but when we work together we are so strong. If we fail to work together, we can bring disunity and we can fail to act with any of the strength we should have. But together as a body we are so strong. So we have to look, to see, where am I as a part of that body? What should I be doing?

Pope Francis has plenty to say to us. I am loving this pontificate of Pope Francis! Bit ironic really – because Pope Francis makes me feel really uncomfortable. But I am very grateful to him for that, because he keeps making those demands on me, that say "Really think what you're doing, John! Is that

right? Is that the right way to do it? Are those the right priorities?” He’s got so much to say to us all. But let’s see what he says to us for our bishops.

He’s had plenty to say! Quite direct! He said to the bishops in South America at World Youth Day, “It’s no good you lot sitting in your Cathedrals with the door open, ready to welcome people when they’re ready to come in; do you have the courage to go out and to walk with people even when they’re walking away from the Church?” That adds a huge dimension to my ministry, to walk with people even when they’re walking away. But then he’s got this wonderful image too, of what the bishop should be as a shepherd. Sometimes he needs to be in front of the flock, leading the way, giving direction, showing by example. And that’s not just the example of word, it’s got to be the example of deeds: the way we live the Gospel in our daily lives. Sometimes the bishop’s got to be right in the middle of his flock, learning about them, learning about the challenges they have, seeing their lives for real. Learning too where the gifts and the talents of the flock belong, so that he can draw on them for the ministry of the Church. Sometimes he’s got to be round the back, just making sure that no one gets left behind, no one drops out for want of care or concern.

I promise you that I will take those principles as principles for my ministry. I won’t get it right. I will make lots of mistakes and I don’t have all the strengths to do that all the time. But maybe as I’m making my mistakes, I’ll be able to learn from them too, and I’ll look to you for your advice to show me those mistakes I have made, so that I can put them right.

Then we come to the priests. Pope Francis has a lot to say to priests. He’s asking the priests to be ministers in service of the people. Not just those who readily come to faith, but those on the fringes of the communities that are committed to our pastoral care. He asks priests to be merciful, compassionate, forgiving with the forgiveness of God himself and that generosity that goes with it. He asks priests to build their own sense of prayer and spirituality, so that in all ways it can strengthen what they do.

Now when Pope Francis speaks in that way to the bishops and to the priests, I don’t think he’s being really critical of us. I think there’s a different image here. To put it in a local context, I think it’s rather like the manager of a world class football team, who’s with his team in the changing rooms before a very big match, who’s saying “You’re selected for the team. I need you. But you’ve got to go out there and perform to your best if we’re going to win the match today.” I think that Pope Francis is saying that to the bishops and the priests: you’ve been selected, called by God, ordained to ministry, and now you must be at your best for the people in your pastoral care.

Then what does he say to all the members of the Church? Well, we’ve only got to go to *“Evangelii Gaudium”*, that wonderful exhortation, now a year old, where he speaks of all the members of the Church, without exception, as being missionary disciples. That gives us two very important dimensions, doesn’t it: first, to be a disciple, to sit at the feet of the Lord, to learn, to understand what it means to live by faith; and then the missionary part, so often forgotten - that we have to take our faith, by our actions, by our decisions, to a world in which we are to speak of goodness and truth and love. In that way we confront the scandals of our day - of poverty and injustice. It’s down to all of us.

My word, what challenges we've got! But we're not starting from zero, are we? Certainly not! I'd like to take this moment to pay great tribute and gratitude to Bishop Terence, who has been your shepherd and your bishop for the last seventeen years. And to Archbishop Patrick, who is also here, who was his predecessor, and to all those predecessor bishops. We're not at zero here, not from what I've seen in the last week. There's a vibrant community here. A Church, which is full of commitment, energy and generosity. And that's what we need to be in the world in which we live. We have got to make a very big contribution to the civil society which is around us.

So what is my first task? I think it needs to be to get to know the Diocese as best I can; to get to know the priests and the parishes; to get to know the schools – so many of them, over two hundred, of which we should be rightfully proud! I want to get to know the religious who, by their witness and their apostolates according to their charisms, have given so much to the life of this Diocese. I also need to need to get to know those organisations and societies, particularly under the umbrella of Caritas and CAFOD, which show the Gospel in action.

Lots to do! But I promise I will do my best. And I will listen. If I am going to listen well, and get the benefit of my listening, I need you to talk! When you need to say something, tell me. If I need to know something, I will be asking, but you must speak your mind. If you've got priorities that you don't think are being attended to, let me know, and let's see what we can do about it. Better still, if you've got your own ideas about how we should be doing things – because that strengthens that body, it means that we're using all our gifts and our talents to strengthen what we are and the witness we give.

As you leave the Cathedral this morning, you will be given a small card. Very simple! On one side is a bit of writing, very selfishly for me! Please pray for me. If I'm going to be a success as your pastor, I depend on you, and I depend on the Lord too, and the grace of the Spirit working through me for our benefit as the Body of Christ. If you turn that card over, there's a little phrase. It takes about 1.5 seconds to say, but it's a prayer: "Stay with us, Lord, on our journey." I hope that that little phrase can become the prayer of this Diocese, said by thousands, every day, several times a day. 1.5 seconds, not too much time to spend there! But it will mean that the Lord will be with us. It will mean that we will understand well his will for us. And if the Lord is with us, that means the Spirit of God is with us too, working through us, and as Saint Paul says, where the Spirit is at work we can do more than we ask for or even imagine.

God bless you for all that you do, for all that you achieve as Church. Let's discover those new challenges, that require new priorities along the way. And let's not be afraid to call ourselves Church, and make a big and serious contribution to the society in which we live. Stay with us, Lord, on our journey. Amen.

BISHOP JOHN'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

I won't delay people, but there are a few people that I need to thank – or a few groups of people, really. First of all, my family and friends, because you are very patient with me, and you have carried me a great deal, and you've taught me a great deal, and I value you and the friendship that we have, and I value your presence here today. Thank you. If I am going to embarrass just one person here today on behalf of my family: my parents aren't here in the physical sense, I'm sure they're looking on from somewhere else. But there is one lady here, Sister Mary Carroll, who is my godmother, who was the midwife when my mother gave birth to me and handed me to my mother for the first time. So her prayers have always been very important to me.

Can I thank the priests of Westminster who are here on behalf of many others who are unable to be here; you've been very patient with me for thirty one years. I think you have taught me a great deal by your example and your experience, and I hope that I will have learned those lessons well.

My thanks too to the clergy of Salford Diocese, particularly for your kind messages of welcome in these last few weeks, and I look forward to getting to know you and your parishes as soon as I can, and working closely with you.

I need to thank the civic dignitaries here today: your presence adds an extra dimension - the Church must never stand alone or in isolation. We need to make an important contribution to the society in which we live, and I hope that we can do that by being clear-thinking in applying the Gospel to our lives, so that we can pursue those real principles that matter to us all. To the ecumenical and interfaith leaders here today, my thanks to you for being here. I gather that there is very good dialogue, good working together, and I hope to the part of that and to enhance it in whatever way I can.

Finally I'd just like to turn to my brother bishops: I've always said that in the nine years that I have been an auxiliary bishop probably the best thing about being a bishop is brother bishops! They have been very kind, very understanding, very helpful, and have given me a good example and been very patient with me. If I may just take out of the wonderful, generous gathering of bishops here today four names: Bishop Terence, to whom I am very grateful for handing on a Diocese in such good order, administratively and I believe spiritually, with such an energy about it; to Archbishop Patrick for his work before that as a predecessor as Bishop of Salford. Then there are two Cardinals here today, Cardinal Cormac and Cardinal Vincent, both of whom I served as priest and auxiliary bishop in Westminster; I am very grateful to them both for all that they've entrusted me with, and the leadership they've given me, and I know that our prayers go with them in all that they do in their valuable ministry for the Church.

Thank you to whoever you are in the Church today, for all that you do and all that you encourage in the life of this Diocese. There seems to be a great deal of life and energy, and I look forward to engaging with I and learning about it. But I would ask you please, make that little prayer important to you "Stay with us, Lord, on our journey."