

Pro-Life Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham 27 Ordinary Sunday of the Year (C) - 3 October 2010

What a privilege it is to be on this pilgrimage with you all and to concelebrate this Mass here in Walsingham.

What do we bring on this pilgrimage? I bring my sinful self seeking the compassionate prayers of the Mother of my Lord and the forgiving grace of her Son. I am sure that we bring with us all whom we love, all with whom we live and work and, in particular, all babies in the womb, the countless newborn children known only to God, those who have sacrificed innocent life, those women who are suffering following abortion, and the nation's young people that they may seek what is true and beautiful in their lives - the ways and the will of God

The list goes on, and can weigh us down, particularly in the light of our own weakness and sinfulness. With the prophet Habakkuk in today's first reading we cry out: "Outrage and violence is all I see." But do we hear God's response that the vision of salvation will come? Do we have the faith to accept that hope? If our soul is not at rights, we will flag, as Habakkuk says, but the upright man will live by his faithfulness.

Central to God's word to us today is the gift of faith. Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, encourages him to fan into a flame the gift God has given to him - faith which is a spirit of power and love and self-control. In faith he urges him to keep as a sound pattern the teaching he has heard. The faith with which he has been entrusted is something precious.

In the Gospel the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith and what a response they get - faith in God is a power that takes impossibilities in its stride. And faith puts us at the service of the Lord without any strings - we are merely servants; we have done no more than our duty. We cannot have a book-keeping mentality in our relationship with God, ringing up bonus points or being in God's good books. God never stops loving us. That love enables us to be faithful servants who do not count the cost.

Here in Walsingham, the Nazareth of England, we honour the perfect model of the faithful servant, Mary the Mother of Jesus. To understand that faith in God is a power that takes impossibilities in its stride, we need only to look to Mary - How can this come about since I am a virgin?.... Let what you have said be done to me - the lowly handmaid. She did not count the cost, and in her faithfulness she was full of life, and she brought new life into the world, Jesus, the way, the truth and the life.

All of us are committed to the Gospel of life. I want to thank you for your witness to the dignity and sanctity of human life. I want to thank those of you who make considerable sacrifices to promote and give practical help in the protection of innocent life. For the dignity and sanctity of human life is the basis of the moral vision we draw from the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. Life issues touch us deeply individually and collectively. And the opposition to what we hold as precious and sacred can seem overwhelming. In faith we bring all that prayerfully on our pilgrimage.

As we renew our commitment and dedication to life issues, hear again God's call to you to holiness, the vocation stressed by Pope Benedict on his visit to Britain two weeks ago, the call to be saints in the footsteps of Blessed John Henry Newman. It was a call stressed by the Bishops in their pre-Election document, choosing the Common Good, the call to be people of virtue - people who are prudent, people who are just, people who are temperate, people who are courageous.

As we take part in this Eucharist sacrifice may we see in the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross the invitation to participate in his eternal sacrifice, as members of his body, and bring the reconciling power of his sacrifice to our world. May these hours in Walsingham be a time to renew our trust in God that his will will be done in all things. May these hours be a time to be renewed in faith and confidence in the power of the spirit at work in you. We saw that power of the spirit in the diminutive and humble figure of Pope Benedict. I saw it, too, in you the Catholic community who bare witness to the faith and the Church with the Holy Father. For that, for your presence here, for your prayer and work for the sanctity of human life, thanks be to God as we celebrate these sacred mysteries of our faith.