



First Sunday of Lent

21st February 2010

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I should like to offer you a short report on the meeting of the Irish Bishops in Rome on 15-16 February with Pope Benedict XVI. The following comments are a synopsis of what I said in St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast at the conclusion of Mass on Ash Wednesday evening.

1. The invitation issued to the diocesan bishops of Ireland by Pope Benedict and his presence at the meeting on Monday and Tuesday is a measure of the importance Benedict XVI gives to addressing the crime, sin and horror of sexual abuse of children, minors and vulnerable adults. The Pope expressed his distress at what had happened here in Ireland.
2. This meeting was a point in the long process of dealing with the tragic shame and wound of abuse in the lives of victims, in the life of the Church and by extension in society. Of itself this meeting cannot heal this horrific wound. We should pray daily that such healing will occur in God's time.
3. The bishops returned time and again in their contributions to the horrific and tragic fact that this occurred within the Church. They recognised that mismanagement had occurred and that there were cover-ups. They articulated the suffering, hurt and pain of victims.
4. Bishops spoke of the action the Church is taking in Ireland to respond to child sexual abuse by clergy, religious and Church workers.
5. In my own contribution I indicated inter alia that the diocese of Down and Connor has a Child Protection Office, staffed by professionals. I recalled that this diocese has a total of 3,182 persons (clergy, religious, lay women and men) who voluntarily work to promote the safeguarding of children in our parishes and their organisations. I instanced this as evidence of the vibrancy of faith in Jesus Christ in our lives and parishes and of participation of laity in the life of the local Church. (Once again I thank all of you who give your time and expertise in this area).
6. The meeting began with a Mass on Monday morning. Cardinal Bertone, Secretary of State, was the main celebrant. Evoking the horror of the crime and sin of sexual abuse, he called us to repentance and renewal. The programme was intense. Bishops met between the working sessions to discuss and prepare the issues arising.

*7. Pope Benedict will issue his Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland in the COURSE Of Lent. He wishes to work on it further After listening to the bishops and to his advisers.*

In today's gospel St. Luke tells us how Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil, the story reminds us starkly about the reality of evil. The battle between good and evil goes on within each of us and in the life of the church. Where there is great good, evil can often exist close at hand. But Jesus reveals a way contrary to that of Satan - the way of humble service and of complete obedience to God's word.

My dear brothers and sisters, I write these lines to you so that you may have some sense of the prayerful and reflective Discussions with Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinals of the Roman Curia. I have chosen to offer these few lines directly to you, my fellow believers in Jesus Christ. I pray that this Lent will be a time of blessings and renewal in our lives,

Yours in Christ,

Noel Treanor

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Bishop of Down and Connor