

## Cardinal Seán Brady's Homily in Attymass

April 26th, 2009

My dear friends in Christ,

A number of journalists came to my house on Friday last. In the subsequent television coverage of the event, I was very glad to see that the flowers in the garden featured prominently. TV crews and their editors have a keen eye for beauty.

Driving here today I was struck by the sheer beauty of the countryside. There is new life everywhere – flowers in full bloom in the gardens, blossoming shrubs and trees in the hedges and young lambs, calves and foals in the fields. I sometimes wonder do we sometimes take it all for granted.

Many of the great scientists never lost their amazement at the marvels that are daily with us. They compared themselves, and their knowledge, to children picking up pebbles on the ocean shore. This legacy of wonder is the source of prayer. Without this radical amazement there is no prayer or praise of God. The surest way to lose our desire to pray is to take things for granted.

The servant of God and cherished son of this parish of Attymass, in whose honour we gather today, Father Patrick Peyton, did not take things for granted. In the opening words of his autobiography *All For Her* Father Peyton refers to the “picturesque beauty of Attymass” – set as it is between the Ox Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean.

Today I realise how blessed he and all of you were, and are, to grow up amidst such wonderful natural beauty of rivers, lakes and mountains. All of that beauty must have helped to form his prayerful character for he tells us that the most important inspiration in his early life was the practice of praying together each day as a family – “Because of the daily family Rosary” he wrote “my home was for me a cradle, a school, a university, a library and most of all a church”.

In the year 2002 another man who did not take things for granted testified to the importance of prayer in his life. In that year Pope John Paul II wrote a letter on the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He said:

From my youthful years this prayer has held an important place in my life. It has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I have always found comfort....The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer – marvellous in its simplicity and in its depth”.

Pope John Paul went on to say: “The family that prays together stays together”. I think that we have all heard that somewhere before. This is exactly the message that Father Peyton had been preaching all his life.

It is wonderful that you have taken such care to remember Fr Peyton in his home parish. You have ensured that the man renowned across the world for preaching the importance of family prayer will always be remembered in the Parish of his family home.

I congratulate all involved in keeping alive the memory of Fr Peyton. I am honoured to have been invited to celebrate this Mass and to unveil the Fr Peyton statue. It is a joy to be here and I thank Bishop Brendan Kelly and Fr Mulligan for their warm welcome and hospitality.

## TRY PRAYER – IT WORKS

One of Father Peyton's wonderful phrases was: **Try prayer – it works**. Obviously, Father Peyton had asked himself the question: Does prayer make any difference? It is a question asked by many people. In prayer we talk directly to God. For example, in this Mass we said "God our Father, you have made us your sons and daughters and restored the joy of our youth; may we look forward with hope to our resurrection". When we address God in this way we are actually responding personally to a God who has already personally addressed us.

In prayer it is God, not we, who takes the initiative. But the question remains, does our prayer affect God in any way? The fact is that God loves us and makes us his sons and daughters. As a result I think we have to say that praise and thanksgiving really pleases God. This really rejoices the heart of God for what God intends is coming about.

Love has also led God to promise to hear our prayers. Surely that promise has made God open to being affected by our prayers. They are prayers that respond to God's own invitation to ask and we shall receive. They are aimed at deepening our friendship with God for God is our loving and powerful God – a God who grants what will improve our union. God grants what we have asked or something that, in the end, is more beneficial. All our prayers are answered – perhaps not always in the way we asked or expected but in a way that is more beneficial.

Prayer has often been described as communication or dialogue with the living God. In that sense the conversations which we have just heard in today's Gospel could be described as a prayer. The two dejected, disheartened disciples were on their way home to Emmaus. Then Jesus draws up alongside them. He engages them in a very lively discussion. They end up totally changed people – changed in mood and attitude. They literally change direction and head back to Jerusalem to join the others. Who can say prayer is not effective?

Yet there are many people now who resist the idea of praying and certainly resist the idea of praying the Rosary. Prayer is an answer to the supreme question: What does God ask of us? The difficulty is that the very question itself has too often disappeared off our radar screens. We have learned to listen to every 'I' except the 'I' of God. The annoying thing is that this resistance to the idea of praying comes from two dramatically opposed ideas. Some think that we are too great to be in need of divine help. Others maintain that we are too small to be worthy of divine guidance. Others do not pray because they are too busy. As a result they deprive themselves of something which could bring them immense good.

Around our country at the moment there are many people who are reeling in shock at the dramatic turn of events in our economy. There are many people who, through no fault of their own, are suffering immense anxiety and distress about their financial situation, often keeping that anxiety carefully hidden from neighbours and friends.

I pray that those who are anxious or distressed about their financial situation will not be too proud to pray or too proud to ask for help. Prayer works. Not always in the way we think it should but – it works. I pray that through the help of God and the help of family, friends and neighbours those in financial distress will find the strength and resources to cope through the difficult months ahead.

In one of the most poignant parts of his autobiography, *All for Her*, Fr Peyton speaks very movingly of the time when, two years before his ordination, he was stricken with a serious illness. He speaks of how he was at his worst – discouraged, depressed and hopeless. He then goes on to explain how, in his despair, he learned three important lessons. I think the lessons Fr Peyton learned in his illness

have something very important to say to our country at this time of economic crisis.

The first lesson was his **‘total dependence on his neighbour.’** In his illness he needed to depend totally on the doctors and nurses and care assistants around him. He had to let go of his pride and to accept their help. He had to admit that he was in need. As he explains: I learned that famous line from literature: “No man is an island.” We are all one family, all one in Christ, all members of His Body. We form with Him a Mystical Body that is closer even than the branches and leaves of a tree are to the trunk that gives them life.’

As Christians we have a family bond with one another and with every person. We have an obligation to help and support one another, especially those who are in need.

Perhaps as a society we need to admit that in recent years all too many of became too proud to ask for help or too preoccupied with our own concerns to offer help to our neighbours and friends. It is often said that as we got wealthier we became less concerned about community and more individualistic. Perhaps we need to rediscover our commitment to one another and to the common good of all. We each need to ask: am I doing enough to help those who are in distress around me? Am I making it possible for people to admit the distress they are in and to ask for help?

The second lesson Fr Peyton learned in his illness, was the **importance and power of the gift Jesus gave to us of His mother**, a gift given to us with his dying breath on the cross. He explains how a close friend said to him on his sick bed: ‘Mary is alive. She will be as good to you as she thinks she can be. It all depends on you and your faith’.

‘That night’, he says, ‘his words activated my dormant faith. It was like setting a match to a hay stack sprinkled with gasoline. Thanks to the family that always prayed the Rosary, I had come to know who Mary was and that Jesus Christ, her Son, had entrusted me to her.’

No matter how bad things are, we are not alone. Our God has not abandoned us. In fact he has assigned the mother of Jesus to us as Our Mother, our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The third lesson Fr Peyton tells us he learned was that, **‘Without God I can do nothing!’**. In John 14, Jesus says: ‘I am the vine, and you are the branches. ‘He who dwells in me; as I dwell in him, bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing!’ (15: 5)

It is not always easy to pray but it is always worthwhile to pray. In fact, there is an increasing body of research which points to the physical, social and psychological benefits of prayer. Our society is hungry for prayer. To meet that hunger I challenge anyone in Ireland to turn off the TV, switch off the mobile, shut down the computer and pray at some stage every day and tell me that the quality of their life was not better as a result. We need time to chat quietly and intimately with our Creator. We need regular prayer as much as we need regular exercise or a healthy diet.

## **FAMILY**

Pope John Paul II insisted that the Rosary is, and always has been, a prayer of the family and a prayer for the family. He saw that today the family is threatened by many destructive forces. He saw the Rosary as a great defence against those destructive forces. For:

When we contemplate the birth of Christ, we learn of the sanctity of life.

When we behold the household of Nazareth, we see the truth of the family according to God’s plan.

Following him on the road to Calvary, we learn the true meaning of suffering. Contemplating Christ and his mother in the glory of Heaven, we see the goal to which each one of us is called.

At the same time he felt that it is natural to bring to our rosaries all the problems and worries of life. There we hand them over to the merciful hearts of Christ and Mary. After 25 years of his life as Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul assures us that it works. The Rosary brings us into harmony with the rhythm of God's own life. It brings our life's destiny and deepest longing into union with God.

Pope John Paul – like Father Peyton – was totally convinced that the family that prays together stays together. It brings families together but it also gives them the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate with one another and to forgive one another. He knew that many of the problems facing families today come from an inability to communicate.

### **Peace in the Family**

Finally, one of my favourite phrases from Fr Peyton's many talks is the one which straddles the main wall in the Fr Peyton Memorial Centre. It is the phrase, '**the world that prays is a world at peace**'.

In his letter on the Rosary, Pope John Paul said he was willingly entrusting to the power of this prayer the cause of peace and the cause of the family. I would wish today to entrust to the Rosary the cause of peace in the family right across this island. I am thinking of the very many people who have suffered violence, been attacked, beaten up or abused. Today I pray fervently for their total healing.

Many of the problems facing contemporary families result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Parents often lament the resistance they encounter when they try to communicate the values of their faith and morals to their children.

I think it is particularly important to reconnect young men with prayer. The popular perception of prayer as a woman's activity is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. It is also a real problem in terms of addressing aggression, violence and immaturity in younger men. It takes sensitivity and humility to pray, qualities which are not always valued or respected among young men but which are essential to maturity and responsible fatherhood.

Pope John Paul was well aware that some families cannot come together often nowadays. The rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television, where scenes of angry violence and bloodshed too often occur. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary would mean

Filling at least part of daily life with very different images - the image of Jesus, for example who is meek and humble of heart - or the image of his most Blessed Mother. It would mean reproducing something of the atmosphere that reigned at Nazareth in the home of Mary and Joseph.

It would involve putting Jesus at the centre of things, sharing our joys and sorrows with him. It would mean placing all our plans, needs and worries and drawing from him the courage, hope and strength to carry on.

Some will object that what I am proposing won't work. St Therese – the Little Flower – at one stage found it very difficult to pray the Rosary so she decided to just say one Our Father and one Hail Mary for each decade very slowly. That worked well and gradually she was able to recite again the

full decade.

### **UP-TO-DATE: TWITTERS, TEXTS AND E-MAILS**

Fr Peyton had a great gift for using the most up-to-date means of social communication. He was pioneering in his use of television to communicate the Gospel and the power of prayer through the Rosary. He attracted the support of many famous film stars along the way. I am sure if there had been mobile phones in his day Fr Peyton would have been big into texting and twitter! He would rejoice in the power of the internet and email to join people together in prayerful solidarity instantaneously and across the world.

In the name of Fr Peyton I would like to make an appeal to every Christian in Ireland today who sends texts, twitters or uses e-mail. I appeal to you to think about setting up groups of prayer between you and your friends using these modern means of communication. I ask young people in particular to think of sending their friends and family an occasional twitter or text to say that you have prayed for them. Make someone the gift of a prayer through text, twitter or e-mail every day. Such a sea of prayer is sure to strengthen our sense of solidarity with one another and remind us those who receive them that others really do care.

### **ATTYMASS HAS REASON TO BE PROUD**

The truths taught by the Servant of God, Fr Patrick Peyton, are worth repeating often:

‘Prayer works – try it!’;  
‘The family that prays together, stays together’ and  
‘The world that prays is a world at peace!’.

Ireland has every reason to be proud of its world famous but humble countryman who achieved so much good by his life as a priest. Attymass has every reason to be proud of its Servant of God and son of the parish. As we celebrate his memory and unveil the new statue of his image, let us pray that our country will be renewed in faith, hope and love by a return to a culture of prayer and a richer spirit of solidarity with one another.

Mary, Queen of Peace. Pray for us.

Amen.