

FINAL PROFESSION SR. MARY BENEDICTA op

I am happy to welcome all of you here today to this Final Profession of Sr. Mary Benedicta. I welcome members of Sister's family, her brother John and Uncle Willy from Nigeria, Fr. Patrick, VG of the Diocese of Nnewi, the Dominican provincials Fr. Michael and Fr. John, and also all of you, family and friends, sisters and priests, who have gathered here today for this solemn Mass. In every Mass, Jesus lays down His life for His Bride the Church, inviting us in return to lay down our lives in love for Him and for others. This holy Exchange, this Divine Gift inviting our human response, is made real for us today as Sister, who since the age of 12 has vowed herself to the Lord, now, after prayer, discernment and joyful betrothal, gives herself totally to Him in mystical marriage.

In that 1stR from Hosea, God spoke thrilling words to His people: *I will betroth you to myself for ever .. with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself .. and you will come to know the Lord.* Those words, applicable to anyone who looks forward to life with God in the happiness of heaven, are surely addressed today in a special way to Sister Mary Benedicta. The human heart is restless until united with God in a personal-passionate friendship, and so our response is rightly the words of the Psalm: *It is your face O Lord that I seek.* But as the Gospel story of the Rich Young Man reminds us, Christian discipleship and spiritual development is never an added extra or a quick fix. *Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.* Just as it cost the Lord everything to save us, so to be a Catholic, to be a Christian, to be a true disciple and imitator of Jesus, will cost us everything.

Sr. Mary Benedicta, you come from a remarkable family! Your father, Long Joe, whose cause may yet be opened, had a profound devotional life centred on a daily Holy Hour spent in Adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist, from which he derived great joy and peace. In this, he sets not only you, but all of us too a wonderful example. Today's secular culture is full of great potential, with many advances that make life busy, absorbing, bright. Yet like the lights of a city at night, today's world can easily block out the sacred canopy of God, heaven, love and happiness, the life of the world to come. As Catholics, we need to find time to pause, to reflect, to pray, to be refreshed and renewed which is why we should take a leaf out of Long Joe's book, finding time to be with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. For there we will find salvation and joy. Indeed, I invite you all to follow carefully Sister's Examination and in your hearts to make your own the promises she undertakes.

Just as in a human body, St. Paul said, so all of us *in union with Christ* belong to one another. Dear Sr. Mary Benedicta, we pray for you today as you make your Final Profession as a Dominican Sister of St. Joseph. Our diocese is indebted to you and to your community for your prayer and service, especially your work of catechesis and formation. *We all have different gifts* but we do ask God to enrich your community with great vitality and with many new vocations. So in this Mass, let us ask the Lord to bless Sr. Mary Benedicta, to keep her safe, and to sustain her over the years ahead. Indeed, let us invoke the prayers of the Blessed Mother, St. Dominic and St. Joseph, for ourselves too, that, changed by this Mass, we might go forth renewed by the Holy Spirit, ready and willing to give ourselves totally to the Lord and His Service.