

BE JOYFUL MISSIONARY DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST!

We reach the end of this Y2K Festival with Mass in honour of St. Aidan and the Saints of Lindisfarne. Holy Island: I don't know if you've ever been? Lindisfarne is in Northumbria; it's a magical place, remote and windswept, cut off at high tide. It was there in the year 634 St. Aidan founded a great monastery, the ruins of which you can still visit today - and I think there's a pub nearby that sells 100 different malt whiskeys! The monks lived a simple life completely centred on the sacred liturgy but they also did *peregrinationes evangelicae*, missionary journeys. St. Aidan and the others would travel round the countryside on foot, visiting farms and villages, talking with people, making friends and dropping into the conversation something about the love of Jesus and the eternal life He offers. By this simple method of intense-prayer and conversation, they eventually converted most of northern England.

*He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives ... to set the downtrodden free.* This weekend we've been thinking about the promises of Jesus: that He'd be with us in the Holy Eucharist, that He is the Bread of Life, the Saviour, Who brings healing and forgiveness. Our faith fills us with joy: it makes us want to share it with others, with our friends and those we meet. True, as Jesus said in the Gospel, *a prophet is not always accepted in his own country; they hustled him out of the town.* But as missionary disciples in Britain, like St. Aidan we must try today to share our faith with others even if we're rejected. In Britain, we have so much to thank God for: the rule of law, the friendliness of people, fish and chips with mushy peas, not to forget our great achievements in science, medicine, sports, the arts. But we also know that in our country at the moment many things are not right; they're going badly wrong. Indeed, as missionaries, we need to combat two dangerous errors or misunderstandings.

First of all, scientism: the stupid idea that science alone gives you the truth, and that religion and other forms of knowledge are just private opinion. Now don't get me wrong: I love living in 21C with its amazing technology. I've always been fascinated by the night sky and I have on my phone a fantastic app that identifies all the stars and constellations you're looking at. But science alone isn't enough. We want in life to be happy. We want to love and to be loved. We want immortality: we want to live forever. This is why science needs ever to be in critical dialogue with other forms of human knowing, such as ethics and faith. After all, most of the important things in life are invisible. Think of love, the love your Mum and Dad have for you, or your love for them. You can't hold love. You can't hear it, see it, measure it. You can't put it under a microscope. But it's real! Many things in life are spiritual, like hope, peace, happiness. So too, God. We can't see Him, touch Him or measure Him empirically, but that doesn't mean He doesn't exist. He's the most real Reality of all! So in our missionary conversations, we need to tackle scientism and its distorted view of human knowing.

But 2ndly, we need to combat relativism, the silly belief that Truth is relative, that what's true for me is not true for you, that everything depends on what *I* think. Britain, a wealthy, secular, pluralist society, is now adrift on a turbulent sea of moral relativism, that already makes it legal to kill an unborn child, but threatens soon to offer the weak, the elderly, the dying, not love, palliative care and a natural death, but

assisted suicide, with euthanasia and eventually eugenics in the offing. Meanwhile, at this very moment, a humanitarian crisis of massive proportions is on our doorstep, with thousands of migrant refugees, desperate and destitute, fleeing war and making perilous journeys across land and sea, but our chief response has been not compassion and help, but more razor wire and palisade fencing. No-one denies the migrant crisis is complex, but Britain's initial response suggests something is not right. Has our country totally forgotten St. Aidan and its Christian history? Is England really going to jettison its traditional values? Is everyone, not least our politicians and our policy-makers, now so religiously illiterate, they've lost their moral compass?

*The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for He has anointed me.* It's great to end on today's feast when we thank God for those early monks who converted this land to Christ and the Gospel. That's our task today, in a country in real danger of losing its soul, and, with no firm beliefs, no moral code, no religious foundation, in real danger of imploding. As Catholics you and I have a crucial mission. So I urge you: Keep the Faith! Pray to Jesus everyday; build up a personal-passionate friendship with Him; spend time in Eucharistic Adoration and let Him refresh you! Love the Mass and go regularly to Confession! Join a young persons group, study Church history and the lives of the saints, and develop some good arguments for faith! Jesus Christ is the only way to TGLHH&F! So in this Mass, as we're sent forth on mission, let's ask the prayers of St. Aidan, the Saints of Holy Island, all the Saints of England, that the Lord will guide us, that He will bestow abundantly the gift of faith, that He'll pour out the Holy Spirit to renew in our land respect for the dignity of every person, with compassion for the needy. And by the prayers of Our Lady of Walsingham, let us also pray for ourselves that in all we think, say and do, we will put God first, we will put our Catholic Faith first, we will put Jesus first, and thus be brilliant missionary disciples of He Who is *the Way, the Life, the Truth*.