

**Homily given by Fr Anthony Chantry
General Superior of the Mill Hill Missionaries
on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Fidei Donum initiative
Portsmouth Cathedral
19th April 2008**

For nine years I lived and worked as a Mill Hill Missionary in a large town in Western Kenya called Kisumu. There are about 45 ethnic groups in Kenya each with its own language, customs and traditions.

The main group in Kisumu is called the Luo People and make up about 90% of the total population of the town.

My experience is that they are a peace-loving, gentle, welcoming people.

Being a large town Kisumu has people from other areas of Kenya working for the government, in the police force or running their own businesses.

They have always lived together in peace and relative harmony:
neighbours in the same streets
shopping at the same shops
working in the same offices
sharing the same hospital
worshipping in the same church.

Then suddenly, at the end of last year following a disputed election result all hell broke loose.

In Kisumu,
those same peace-loving people
took to the streets and chased away those of other minority tribes.

They burnt down their businesses
184 shops were looted, some gutted by fire
their cars and lorries were set ablaze
and their homes were demolished.

Shortly after this I visited Kisumu.
I went with some friends of mine through the areas of burnt out shops and houses and then one of them said to me:
How could we do this to each other?

It struck me as the key question:
How can we do such terrible things to each other?

In order to do these kinds of terrible things to each other

we first have to believe the lies each group tells about the other group.

Go to any of the great places of violent conflict in the world
past and present

Middle East, Iraq, N. Ireland, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Burma
Sudan, South Africa

and you will hear the same kinds of lies and falsehood:

They cannot be trusted
They are not as civilised as we are
They all want to kill us
They are wrong
They all hate us

It is when we begin to listen to the dark voices of division that
tell us that others are different
and that that difference is a threat, a danger
an enemy, responsible for a long list of problems and evils
that we prepare the ground for the seeds of violent conflict.

Difference can be the colour of your skin
or the religion you belong to
or the economic group or class you find yourself in
or ethnic group or clan you were born into.

These lies are widespread and seem to find a willing audience
and can lead us into falsehood, a false conclusion:

Ask any South Africans 30 years ago and they would have said:
Blacks and whites can never live together, should not ever live together, the
difference is too much.

They were wrong.
Thanks to great peace-makers like Nelson Mandela
they are living together and there are problems
but they were wrong.

And there are worse lies:
God only loves those who are in my religion, the true religion
and everyone else outside of it is doomed and damned.

I heard recently a young American soldier in Iraq being interviewed about
what he thought about the meaning of his presence there.

I am part of God's army and we are doing God's work here
and we will continue to do it until the job is finished, he said.

I do not judge him
because he is as much a victim of the lies that are told as the rest of us.

Ask any suicide bomber, just before they go out to kill and maim men, women and children, and they will say, "I am doing God's will."

Lies find a home on both sides of any conflict.

This is fundamentally a betrayal of the vision of the prophets like Isaiah and above all the vision of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are offered the Truth
that beautiful truth that comes from God himself
a Truth we are bathed in at our baptism
and blessed with in our Mission to the world.

It is the Truth
that in God we all belong together
in all the rich variety of our giftedness
in all the wonderful diversity of our being
in the splendour of our difference
we are, each of us here, and beyond doubt and without reservation
loved by God and called into communion with Him and each other.

The prayer of Jesus in the Gospel today
calls us to a deep unity in him
which will radiate out into our chronically divided world.

The victory over the falsehood of natural disunity
has been won for us by God
through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ
and our Mission is to bear witness to this communion
this special unity with God
so that the world will realise that Jesus has loved us
as much as God the Father has loved his Son Jesus.

Don't be shy!
Each one of us here has experienced the love of God in our lives
we did not deserve it
we did not force it
we did not have to beg for it.

It might have come to us through the loving care of our faith-filled families
or a feeling of being accepted as we really are
or a sense of being forgiven a great sin
or profound comfort at a time of crisis or loss.

However God came to us
and entered our lives
he has changed them forever
because of the kind of love that only God can offer.

The Good News is simply that “God loves us”
and our Mission is to share this with others.
If we lose sight of this central Truth
then, sadly, Mission will itself become a source of division.

I entered training for the MHMs in 1975, on my 21st birthday
I trained for 6 years and was sent to Kisumu, Kenya
where I spent 9 years.
After that I spent the next 10 years training missionaries in London
and a further 5 years in South Africa
before being elected into my present position.

I was reflecting on this recently and suddenly realised that
in 27 years of missionary witness
not one person has ever come to me and said
“I want to be baptised and become a Catholic because of you”
Not one!

Have I failed as a missionary?
I might have failed in other ways
I am sure I have.

What I do know is that God has used me to love others
imperfectly and maybe even selectively
but yes
God uses us to love others.

We cannot measure the success of mission in terms
of the number of converts
- this is only one fruit of mission.

The Maryknoll Missionary and theologian William Burrows
wrote that the fundamental Christian ethic is
“to make good things happen that would not happen
if the disciple of Christ were not there.”

Is this not the fundamental task of a mission,
to make good things happen that would not happen
if the missionary were not there?

Fifty years ago the call came from Rome for dioceses of the developed
churches to send priests to the developing churches
the Fidei Donum, the gift of faith, initiative.

Priests volunteered from this diocese
and supported by you the people of this diocese,
went out to make good things happen in Bamenda, Cameroon.

In a recent visit to Bamenda, former archbishop of Bamenda, Archbishop Verdzekow spoke to me of the great affection and appreciation he has for the wonderful contribution of your priests who worked there who along with our Mill Hill Missionaries and other missionary groups have built up a strong and lively Church which is itself now becoming more missionary.

Our celebration today is rightly focussed on the good efforts of these priests from your diocese but would be lacking if it did not acknowledge the great missionary outreach of the whole diocese:

men, women and young people
Religious – Sisters, Brothers and Priests
who in different ways have supported, encouraged
and directly taken part in Mission
abroad and at home,
for Mission takes place wherever we are.

In looking back in thanksgiving
we find inspiration and energy to see ahead
to what the Lord invites us to continue
for our work has only just begun.

During this Mass we are all going to be asked
to re-commit ourselves to mission
in an act of dedication.

We will accept our responsibilities to support the work of mission,
to strive for a just and peaceful world
to build up the Church throughout the world
to bring people together in mutual respect and God-centred harmony.

All this translates into each of us going back to our own situation
and listening to God
and responding willingly and generously to what he asks of us in mission
for this is God's Mission, not our own.

I suggest there are three things have to happen
if we are to take our call to mission seriously:

First we have to start with a Mission to ourselves:
to look at our own lives
the attitudes we have
our prejudices
our assumptions
the way we see other people who are different in one way or another.

We have to examine ourselves to identify what lies we have believed
and what lies we tell ourselves about others.

We must start with ourselves and allow God to transform us with his love.

Secondly, if necessary we have to put our own house in order:
 to make sure our parish communities are places of welcome
 that everyone is included in their life
 that possible tensions between groups are expressed and dealt with
 and any hurt is healed
 and that we are seen to be working hard on our own communion.

We need to be able to appreciate with deep gratitude
 the wonderful diversity of humanity in our parishes
 and rejoice as God's people in all its variety and vigour.

Thirdly,
 we must all explore new ways of reaching out to others
 and to the world as a whole:
 the migrant, the stranger, the rejected in our midst
 the one who is hurting
 those broken by the very lies we have rejected
 those consumed by their own selfishness
 to those who suffer because of international greed:
 the poor of this world and victims of injustice
 to our planet, our environment, to respect it and heal it.

We reach out to others individually in our daily lives.

Through the ministry of our parishes to others in the locality.

We reach out to the world through a whole variety of Catholic agencies and
 charities such as APF and CAFOD.

And in all of this we tell the Truth about our God:

Our God loves and cherishes all of us as his children
 and calls us into communion with Him and with each other.

For I believe with all my mind and heart
 that one day
 all the nations of this world
 will come together
 and see in each other the manifestation of God's goodness
 and they will listen to each other
 share each other's joys and feel each others pain
 and discover afresh the only thing that will ever join us as one
 the unconditional love of God.

No more will the nations use difference as an excuse for war
 no more violence
 no more hatred
 only peace.

For Jesus has set us apart
and sent us out in to the world
so that through our words and actions
which are rooted in the Truth of God's love for us
he will draw all people together in Him
so that we may all be one
just as Jesus and the Father are one.

It is the love of God, and only God's love
that will bring us together.

If we can stay close to this Truth
then the prayer of Jesus
"FATHER, MAY THEY ALL BE ONE"
will be answered
not because of what we are able to achieve
but because we dare to believe
in the power of God's love in our lives.