**HOMILY – RITE OF ELECTION**

In this week we recall with great gratitude the first anniversary of the Election of our dear Holy Father, Pope Francis.

In describing his own faith, he said,

“One day in particular….was very important to me: 21 September 1953. I was almost 17. It was “Students’ Day”, for us the first day of spring — for you the first day of autumn. Before going to the celebration I passed through the parish I normally attended, I found a priest that I did not know and I felt the need to go to confession. For me this was an experience of encounter: I found that someone was waiting for me. Yet I do not know what happened, I can’t remember, I do not know why that particular priest was there whom I did not know, or why I felt this desire to confess, but the truth is that someone was waiting for me. He had been waiting for me for some time. After making my confession I felt something had changed. I was not the same. I had heard something like a voice, or a call. I was convinced that I should become a priest.

This experience of faith is important. We say we must seek God, go to him and ask forgiveness, but when we go, he is waiting for us, he is there first!......he is there, waiting. The Lord is waiting for us.”

At this celebration we have the joy of welcoming those of you who are seeking baptism and the Easter Sacraments within the Catholic Church, or full communion with the Catholic Church. Each of you has your own journey which has brought you here and this is beautiful. Each one is unique, for some the journey to the Church and to faith has been long and tangled, perhaps there have been some wrong turns. What is important is that you come to the Catholic Church because you believe here you can continue the journey with a community who believe, and with whom you know you will encounter Jesus Christ.

The first thing to remember for all of us is that when we seek God, we discover something quite remarkable. We discover He is already waiting to welcome us, to offer us his love. So to all of you who seek to be full members of the Church, who want to participate in the sacraments of the Church, know that God has been waiting for you. Your name is already inscribed in His heart and His dream for you is that you, day by day, discover more deeply what it is to encounter Him. Always remember that Jesus is waiting for you and He will never abandon you.

This is the great gift of this Holy Season, when we prepare once more to unite ourselves with Jesus in His Passion Death and Resurrection. In the sacraments that you receive at Easter you encounter Jesus fully. May this encounter continue to develop in your lives as you journey more deeply in the faith. Never forget that what is important is our encounter with Jesus. This is what gives us faith because He is the One who gives it to us.

In the Gospel we have heard Jesus is led into the wilderness, the desert, to be tempted by the evil one. In his human nature Jesus gives voice to His total dependence on His Father. In the confrontation with the evil one, the tempter, the devil, Satan, - the Bible uses different descriptions at different times - Jesus shows us that to be truly human we need to remember our dependence not on ourselves but on Him. He is the one who continues to bring us before the face of the Father.

In the Biblical tradition then, the reality of the desert gives voice to that experience where the human heart most of all discovers its dependence on God. Our Emeritus Pope, Benedict XVI, has reminded us that this is not just a physical reality. We live in a time, in which “a Spiritual desert is spreading – an interior emptiness, an unnamed fear, a quiet sense of despair.” (Homily for World Youth Day, Sydney, 20th July 2008).

Now more than ever people need the joy of the Gospel and the company of a community filled with faith. Dear Catechumens and Candidates, you come to the Catholic Church because you sense here, in the deserts of everyday life, that you can meet He who is the living water and Who is the answer to all of our thirsts.

He waits for you and longs to unite Himself with you. As you commit yourself to use this time of Lent well to prepare for the Easter sacraments we promise you our prayer and support and we entrust you to the intercession of Mary, our Mother. May she watch over you always and always give you joy in the faith of the Church.

Rt Rev Mark O’Toole

Bishop of Plymouth

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