

## **Homily for the Jubilee Mass of Celebration and Thanksgiving, Mary Immaculate Church, Shannon – 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2016**

### ***Welcome***

I extend again very warm welcome to you all this morning as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the dedication of the Church of Mary Immaculate here in Shannon. It is an occasion to rejoice and celebrate and savour memories and look to the future with hope and great faith.

### ***Church – The People of God***

A Church is always a people before it is a building. For that reason it is very appropriate that we would celebrate a coming together in faith of the people of this parish on this happy day. The Irish or Gaelic word for a church is not so much a *séipéal* or an *eaglais*, but *teach an phobail*. *Teach an phobail*. The house of the faith community, living, vibrant, alive, outward looking, well!

In 1966 this church was dedicated to Our Lady, Mary Immaculate. For the past 50 years you have cared for and maintained this church so that it is in the beautiful condition in which we find it today. I know that you, the people of the parish takes great pride in looking after it so well and it is a wonderful tribute to yourselves and the clergy to see it look so well today.

### ***Interest in the development of Shannon***

As a young student in Carraroe, not many years ago, ( I hasten to add) I recall being fascinated learning during geography class of interesting project of the creation of a brand new town in the South West of Ireland, ex nihilo, out of nothing so to speak. Yesterday while travelling via bus from Dublin to Galway I had the most pleasant experience of reading a lot of the great work of Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin, Birth of an Airport Parish, the Early years of St. Senan's, Shannon, 1945-1988.

### ***Comprehensive Education***

As a past pupil of the Comprehensive school system myself in An Cheathrú Rua, I jumped straight to the development of the school section here in Shannon and thoroughly enjoyed the account of that.

### ***Interesting Historical Background***

The narrative of the events of those early days are an intriguing account of religious, political and community life of the time. It was interesting to trace the developments of the community and Church also from the literature given by Fr. Tom, the Jubilee Chapel, St. Anthony's Shrine, recent renovations and extensions and most of all the Room of Mercy, Seomra na Trócaire to commemorate the year of Mercy – to be blessed and officially opened today.

### ***The People of God – Search for a Place***

The people of God from which we are from were always wandering, either to take the word of God to other nations or to search for the presence of God in their own lives or in their own generation. Since the arrival of St. Patrick on these shores we too have been a restless people searching for God in the mists of the mountains or in places made holy by the prayers of our ancestors. In these days so full of contradictions and confusions, we still search for sense to our suffering and purpose to our pain as well as our joys and happiness. We gather today to rejoice as we celebrate the Jubilee of this 50 year old Church as it has been for many a place that gave meaning to much of that search for the past half century.

### ***Church – Holy Ground – Sacred to the memory of People***

This place is holy ground and we tread gently on its earth as we come to give thanks and praise to God of all our searching. We are acutely aware of the struggles of the men and women who worshipped here over the years and who held on to God in days more challenging than our own. We are aware of their struggles to get things off the ground from scratch and create a home and community and Church for themselves. They watched as while many stayed and prospered, so also many of their sons and daughters left the beauty of this place in the west of Ireland to earn a living in a lonely

exile. This is a holy place because so many made pilgrimage to God right here to the very end. This is a holy place because of the unnamed people who laid the stones to build this church and because of the sacrifices you yourselves have made to make a dwelling for God here in Shannon.

### ***Sacred Events***

Down the years, this Church has seen the children of its baptismal font grow in the grace of God, some to stay, some to go abroad, some to continue the family name at home, others to carry the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. This Church has seen the promises of marriage honoured in the face of hardship and inevitable grief. This Church has seen its people coming here to bring their pain and their brokenness, their joys and delights and happiness to their God.

### ***Church today***

Life today is not as stringent as it was fifty years ago, yet in many ways it remains just as difficult to cling to God. There are many strident voices declaring that if Jesus is the way that he claimed, then the path is overgrown and the way perilous, and signposts are few and far between. There are many who hold out to us a shortcut to joy and a bypass to sufficiency in an uncertain age. There are many who follow the Messiah of mayhem who will lead us to believe that violence is the only gateway to the future and yet Jesus Christ declares to all of us here on this October weekend, some 2000 year after he walked the earth that he is still the way, the truth and the life.

### ***Proud of the Work Done***

In the urgency and the bustle of our day, we need time to pause, time to reflect. This Church so beautifully maintained by all of you is such a place to pause, to rest by the wayside on our pilgrim path to God. Its doors will be open to all who would respond to Christ's gentle invitation to come inside and rest awhile. In this pilgrim setting it will welcome the tourist and the traveller, the school bagged child, the hard-pressed parent, the returned exile, the sinner and the saint. Here they may all experience the warmth, love and hospitality of God. Here they will discover that what God did in the

past, he can do now, what God did in the holy land he can do here in Shannon, what God did to others, he can do to us today.

### ***The importance of Place of Origin***

A sense of place is extremely important for us as Irish people. If we meet someone whom we have not met before, one of our first questions will be “where are you from”. The answer to that question will give an insight into the person and provides an opportunity for further discussion and relationship. I am delighted to see that so many have turned out and some have come home to celebrate this parish Jubilee as Church here in Shannon.

### ***Welcome to those Returned Home***

Today, I am happy to extend a very warm welcome to those who have recently returned home and to new people to the parish. This parish has made and continues to make a very significant contribution to the West, to the country in general and to places wherever people of Shannon happen to go. They bring with them something of the identity, the character and the vibrancy of this place as they settle in and make contributions towards the places of their adoption. May your participation in this parish re-union provide you with a deeper sense of your own place.

### ***Improvements at Home***

We all rejoice in the great improvements which have been taking place in our country in recent years. We witness it in a new confidence, in living standards, in the fact that unlike the past those who are leaving Ireland today are doing so largely out of choice – in the past they had no choice as they left in search of employment and a new future. People from other countries are coming to our shores today just as many of our own had gone in the past to England, America and Australia and we welcome them among us.

### ***Quality of Life in Rural Ireland***

It is not uncommon in a society where economics and productivity are seen to be so important to find other values neglected. Here in the West of Ireland and in a special

way in a place like Shannon, neighbourliness, faith and family are powerfully sustaining values and have served us well down the years.

I believe that places like Shannon have so much to offer today. There is a quality of life available here that is not available in our over-crowded cities where the infrastructure is lacking.

This parish celebration provides you with an opportunity to acknowledge the great improvements which have taken place in the area since the humble origins and tentative beginnings 50 years ago and more. It's an occasion for taking pride in the place and becoming more aware of your identity. As we remember the past, those who have worked and made sacrifices so that we could enjoy the present, we thank God and as we look to the future we pray that we will remain true to the faith and values we have inherited and that we will be generous in making our contribution so that people will be enabled to enjoy a good quality of life in the Shannon of the future.

### ***Congratulations and Best wishes***

Finally I congratulate your Parish Clergy, Frs. Tom, Arnold and Brendan, native clergy Frs. Pat and Fergal, the pastoral council, the Organising Committee and all who make this celebration and Mass of thanksgiving possible. I hope you will all have a most enjoyable entertaining and memorable day as you travel down memory lane, renew old acquaintances and give thanks to God for this jubilee day.