**HOLY TRINITY RATHMINES.**

**TRINITY SUNDAY, 2017.**

**Rector’s Farewell Sermon.**

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.”* (2 Cor. 13: 11.)

The first thing I want to do this morning is a very heart-felt ‘thank you’ to everyone in this parish who has supported and encouraged me since I arrived in Harold’s Cross just over 35 years ago, and here at Rathmines over 32 years ago. I came to Harold’s Cross for 3 years, and all these years later am finally leaving. It has been a challenging 35 years, but rewarding nonetheless. 35 of the 42 years I have been ordained have been served in this parish.

I spoke at the Easter Vestry of the voyage we have been on together, using an image from Hipploytus who suggested that “the wings of the ships are churches in the sea of the world; and the Church like a ship tossed in the waves.” The word ‘nave’ for the centre of the church comes from the word ‘naval’, and so the connection with the sea is there. It was an appropriate image as I recalled the dry rot, caused by water, and its repair, (It at least proved it was not all in my head,) and the three the major floods in Harold’s Cross; the closure of the church in 2001, and its subsequent leasing and finally

sale to the Russian Orthodox Church. There was the uniting of the two parishes which had been grouped together since 1977. It is every Rector’s worst nightmare to have to deal with a church closure, but the decision was made by the people, and supported by them.

In Rathmines the project to repair and re-develop this Church building into a multi-purpose parish centre, the sale of the old parochial hall to pay for it, and the wonderful legacies we received which made the task easier. Last Sunday I showed representatives of the Armenian community around our church building, and last Tuesday, representatives of Tullow Parish. What we did here in 1990 is still attracting attention, and providing food for thought for other parishes. We started with 6 buildings, and have ended up with two, this church and the Rectory. That dramatically reduced the overheads and made the parish financially viable. Another major legacy when it was all finished ensured the financial base of the parish for the present.

Having spent money on our buildings it became time to invest in people, and so the ‘Fresh expressions’ service was begun 6 years ago. Over those years it has grown and has now become an integral part of the parish having merged the accounts and shared places on the Select Vestry, nominators and synod representatives. What has been done in that regard was quoted favourably at the meeting of the Diocesan Councils last Thursday. I suggested at the Easter Vestry that looking back on all that we have achieved together, and having worked together to achieve it, I can discern the guidance of God’s Spirit in all of that. There were differences of opinion, but no major disagreements, and that can only have come about because what we were doing, and continue to do, has been done under the prayerful guidance of God’s Spirit on all of us. That is something I will never forget. That is also why I thank all in the parish who have supported and encouraged the work here.

Nor will I forget the people I have met and worked with in this parish during those years. Our Epistle reading this morning speaks of the members of the church as saints. I have known many here during all those years. Many is the time I have had to bite my tongue when I have heard people criticised for not doing enough for the church, for I knew that those people being criticised were involved with meals on wheels, working in local charity shops, involved in political parties, or simply going out of their way giving themselves to help their neighbours. I recall getting a lesson in that. There was a house I used to visit in which one of the men of the house who was retired never seemed to be in when I called. When I asked him one day what he did he just replied a ‘bit of this and that.’ When he died his funeral was one of the largest I conducted in this parish. As far as I could discover he had held a very senior position in one of our large charities, and did so on a voluntary basis when these days such a job would command a six figure salary. He didn’t want anyone to know. That, to me, is the stuff of saints.

Shortly after arriving in Harold’s Cross I was asked by the then Principal of the College of Education, and asked if I would consider taking on the Chaplaincy in the College. I did, and remained there until the College moved to DCU last year. It gave me the opportunity to work with a great staff, and dedicated students. For me, to be involved with people who will influence our young children’s lives was a great pleasure.

I cannot forget the work in the Hospice. I was welcomed there in 1982 by a nun who was about my own age. Over the years there I received both support and encouragement from the Sisters of Charity. I had never had much to do with nuns before going there. It saddens me to see them being denigrated in public at the present time. I have seen their dedicated work, their long hours looking after people who were terminally ill, or who suffered long term illnesses. I have seen many examples of the pioneering work they have done there and in London. I have met many courageous people there, the parish organist who left the Hospice on a few occasions to play for a funeral, knowing his own could be the next one. The street trader who had a large poster above her bed: ‘Get revenge. Live long enough to be a problem to your kids.’ The woman who left the Hospice to care for her family after her husband committed suicide. I never left the Hospice without feeling that I had received more than I had given. Between that, and my responsibilities in Mount Jerome, it is a parish that constantly reminded me of my own mortality, and helped keep my feet on the ground – especially when two people I went to primary school with died there.

Today we are celebrating the 189th. anniversary of the consecration of this church on Trinity Sunday, 1828. Built in a field, the township of Rathmines grew around it. This building reflects the changes in this area. It was extended in the 1840s, virtually re-built and extended in the 1880s, and re-developed in 1990. It reflects the growth during the 19th. century of the Church of Ireland population in this area. Since the 1920s it has been declining, and we have faced that too. The only original part of this building is the west wall, tower and spire, the rest has been changed and adapted.

I was recently reminded that the word ‘parish’ has its origins in the word used of Jesus as he joined two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is translated ‘stranger,’ and the word we use for ‘parish’ referred originally to those who lived beyond the city’s boundaries. The parish is set in the world, but is not of it. In that sense it is a ‘strange’ community. In ancient times the Christian ‘parochia’ were those who did not belong in a worldly sense, but had found their place in the community of Jesus. If you find a certain strangeness about the church and its life, there lies its origins.

This church is dedicated to that peculiar Christian vision of God the Trinity. We see the symbol of that on the west wall outside, and on the communion table frontal. On your service sheet the front cover tries to fill in the symbol behind me, and there are a couple more illustrations to help you reflect on that vision of God at the back of the sheet. You will find a version of the illustration on the inside back cover above the choir stalls in Christ Church Cathedral, but it is in Latin. The icon of the Trinity on the back reflects our connections with the Russian Orthodox community. The gap at the front of the table draws you in as you contemplate it. The Trinity speaks to us of a God who is above and beyond us, on whom we depend; a God who came among us and shared our human life out of love for the world; and a God who is still among us through his Spirit leading us and guiding us as we continue our journey, our voyage through this life.

I hand the parish back to the Archbishop at the end of the month with very mixed feelings, but effectively today as I will be on holiday for the rest of the month getting my house ready for the move. I do so in the hope that I have served this parish to the best of my ability, and with the help, guidance and assistance of many faithful people in this place. I thank them all, living and departed, for their quiet faithfulness. But at the end I can do no better than conclude with the words of St. Paul with which I began:

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*

May God bless you all as you continue to live and work to God’s praise and glory.