

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor's homily, St Anne's, Liverpool

21 November 1008

SECAM-CCEE Seminar

On the second day of the international SECAM-CCEE conference on migration taking place in Liverpool, Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor at the church of St Anne's – an inner-city parish which offers a place of sanctuary to new arrivals in the city and asylum seekers.

Full text of the Cardinal's homily:

The Book of Revelation is a challenging text on which to reflect. As we know there was in earlier times controversy as to whether or not it should even be included in the canonical biblical texts. It is interesting, for us in our meeting together in these days, that it was the African Church fathers such as firstly Tertullian, and then Methodius and Origen who were among those to promote its apostolicity.

We can hear proclaimed to us the words of the hymn we have just heard:

“You bought men for God
of every race, language, people and nation
and made them a line of kings and priests,
to serve our God and to rule the world”.

The language of the Apocalypse could so easily be the language of slavery: because it speaks of men who are bought so that they can serve. But clearly the Apocalypse is not a vision of slavery, but a vision of freedom.

A freedom that comes about through the sacrifice of the Lamb. It is the Lamb of God who has bought men for God. And surely we recognise this at the breaking of bread: “This is the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper”.

It is about hope, because it is to the service of God that humanity has been committed – and in serving God, we love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

The language may be similar, but there is nothing of the discrimination, oppression and tyranny of slavery. Rather it is a call to gather addressed to every race, language, people and nation: a call to unity and communion.

Only last week two Bishops from Zimbabwe joined our own Bishops meeting and during that, they expressed their thanks that the Church in this country has been so welcoming to those who have come from abroad. That made me proud and at the same time reminded me – and all of us – of the opportunity migration can present to the Christian – a true chance to welcome God in both friend and stranger.

And so I am so pleased that your meeting is taking place in Liverpool and that Archbishop Patrick suggested that we celebrate the Eucharist together in this parish. It has become home to people from all over Africa, and in building this community the people here are gradually laying to rest the sad – and shameful - history of slavery associated with this city.

Instead what we have before us here, as in Catholic parishes in my own Diocese and in many other parts of Britain, is almost a living vision of that Hymn of the Apocalypse, those of every "race, language, people and nation".

It is in our willingness to see the opportunity of God offered in every single one of our brothers and sisters that we can construct kingly and priestly communities of service, worship and charity.

I pray sincerely that your gathering as Bishops of Africa and of Europe will renew you and will also give heart to this great city of Liverpool and to the communities among whom you will spend your time these days. And it is my prayer that you can return from here to your own homes, your own cities and your own communities joyful and renewed in what you have seen and in the knowledge that the Lamb has "bought men for God of every race, language, people and nation and made them a line of kings and priests, to serve our God and to rule the world".