



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Mental Health Conference

Bishop Richard Moth's Homily

3-4 FEBRUARY 2012, HINSLEY HALL, LEEDS

In 2010, this country was blessed to welcome Pope Benedict XVI. His visit was memorable for all in the Church and beyond. His call to people of faith to engage with society at every level, given so clearly at Westminster Hall, was a key moment of that visit. It is interesting to note that this project of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales had already begun. In engaging with those in our communities who face the challenge of difficulties in mental health, much has been done to raise awareness of so many important issues both within the Church and beyond. To say that this project is timely would be to put it mildly!

During his visit, Pope Benedict called us to reflect anew on Blessed John Henry Newman's reflection on the "definite service" to which each of us is called. This project places before the Church in this country a "definite service" – and one that is so needed in these times in which we live when the pressures on many people are very great indeed. The student worrying about fees and examinations; the street-dweller trying to get out of the spiral of homelessness; the traveller in prison, lost and alienated from all around; the Alzheimer sufferer, facing increased memory loss; the family member caring for a loved one; service personnel returning home and unable to share their devastating experiences with family; the young person suffering from an eating disorder – the list seems endless.

Our parish communities cannot become primary mental health trusts! But, the Gospel demands of us a positive response to our brothers and sisters who are seeking a way forward in the midst of their difficulties and struggles. Discerning the right way to welcome and offer help is not always easy, all the more so when great delicacy and sensitivity is required.

In today's first reading, Solomon seeks for a discerning heart. God responded to his prayer and granted him wisdom as none had had before. We must make Solomon's prayer our own, asking for wise discernment as we take this project forward and as we strive to raise awareness in our dioceses, parishes and schools. Like Solomon, we must learn to ask the right question. It is our openness to the wisdom that the Spirit gives that will enable us to continue the work that has been begun in us.

What is it, then, that lies at the heart of this work?

It is clear from today's Gospel that Jesus' message was irresistible to all who heard him. The disciples sat at his feet and went out in pairs to spread the message. When they came back from their mission and were invited to a time and place of rest by Jesus Himself, vast crowds sought out Jesus and his apostles. They were lost without Jesus and craved His every word, for in that word they discovered a dignity and a love that they could find nowhere else. They found meaning for their lives in their encounter with the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The core of this project is to be found in the dignity that is innate in every human being. The dignity of the human person is at the heart of the Gospel message and is central to the teaching of the Church. It is not for nothing that this project has been funded from the "Day for Life" collection – for this is practical expression of the respect for life, the striving for the recognition of that dignity, that is so much a part of the Church's mission. Those of us engaged in this project have been given an important place in that mission as we call the faith community and wider society too to respect, welcome, support and love those who live with difficulties in mental health.

In this Conference we celebrate the work that we have begun, we pray for the wisdom to ask the right questions and discern our way forward, that through our continued effort under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all our communities may truly become places of welcome and healing where every person can find the support and understanding they need, recognise the dignity that is theirs and find the joy of life lived to the full.