

**Mass of Thanksgiving for the Vincentian Mission in Dunstable – 1927 to 2019
6 pm on Saturday, 28 September 2019 at St. Mary's, Dunstable**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Are you dedicated to God? Am I dedicated to God? In the words of St. Paul to Timothy, are we filled with faith and love, patient and kind?

God's word challenges us constantly about our lifestyle and about our priorities, about what comes first in my life. We can come to Mass and, at the same time, be seduced by the comforts and the food and the drink that are projected into our homes on the television.

The Prophet Amos warns the rich in our first reading against a luxurious life style that inoculates them against the needs of everyone around them.

Certainly, the rich man in the Gospel was blind to the poor man, Lazarus, who lay at his gate. When, too late, the rich man recognises his failure and his loss, he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers. Abraham's response is in some ways chilling – "If they will not listen either to Moses or the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and are we listening to him this evening? The mission to preach Christ crucified and risen is the mission of the Church. It is the mission of each of us. This weekend I have sent a Pastoral Letter to all the parishes in the Diocese to introduce the initiative of Pope Francis to make this

October an Extraordinary Month of Mission. The Holy Father wants us to have a greater consciousness of our responsibility to pass on the Gospel at home and abroad. So, this October is a time for us to recognise ourselves as missionary disciples, working and praying together to share God's love with everyone, everywhere.

As I write in the Pastoral Letter, it is not rocket science. It just requires a humble openness to God's grace in the opportunities we have in our conversations with others. As the soon to be canonised Blessed John Henry Newman's motto states, "Heart speaks unto heart."

I was given a great example on the way back from the Lourdes Pilgrimage. I was boarding the plane with a parishioner from Bedford. As we stood in the queue, she started chatting with an Italian vet living in Cardiff. He mentioned that he had called in to Lourdes and had lit a candle. He said that it reminded him of his mother's devotion and of what he was missing since he had stopped practising his faith. The Bedford parishioner listened and then encouraged him to find his local church. She almost persuaded him to go back to Lourdes next year to help on the pilgrimage!

I have no doubt that God's grace was at work on those aircraft steps, and I have no doubt that God's grace is at work in the Church's missionary activity around the world.

And I have no doubt about the grace of God in the mission of the Vincentian Fathers and the Daughters of Charity here in Dunstable. For 92 years the

Vincentians have served the Church here in Dunstable, and tonight we give thanks to God at this Mass for that great gift.

Prior to 1927 the small community of Catholics in Dunstable had had to travel to Luton for Sunday Mass. But then in late July 1927 the secretary of the Dunstable Church Building Fund Committee with the support of the then parish priest in Luton, Father O'Connor, wrote to the Bishop about the possibility of having Mass in Dunstable. Soon afterwards the Spanish Vincentian Fathers from Potters Bar sent a priest to serve in Dunstable. Then, in 1957, the Vincentian Fathers from the Anglo-Irish Province took over the parish and in 1964 the new St. Mary's Church was opened.

I am sure that many of you will have great memories to share about the past decades here in Dunstable. For me, I have the memory of Vincentian Fathers, always welcoming and very hospitable, dedicated to the service of God in their ministry. In particular, I think of the men I have known of great intellect and ability who have given their lives to God and the Church. Their story is very precious and provides a springboard for the continuing mission of the Church in this parish led by Father Tony Brennan.

Through the Provincial of the Vincentians, I want to thank the Congregation of the Mission for their years of service here and for the generous, open and caring way in which you have passed the parish on to the Diocese. Father Paschal, your brothers, living and dead, are very much in my prayers and, I am sure, of everyone here at this Mass.

May God grant that the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, who gave himself to the service of the poor and to the training of priests and founded the Vincentians and the spirit of St. Louise de Marillac who founded the Daughters of Charity may inspire us all to be true disciples of Jesus and missionaries of his Gospel.
Amen.

+Peter Doyle
Bishop of Northampton