



Homily  
Mass in Thanksgiving For The Ministry of  
Mgr Kevin McGinnell

7<sup>th</sup> December 2021

We are celebrating this Mass in thanksgiving for Mgr Kevin's time as Episcopal Vicar for Education and Formation on the Vigil of the Solemnity of Our Blessed Lady Immaculate. It is totally appropriate then, that this moment should be associated with the celebration of our diocesan principal patron. Education is at the heart of the Church's pastoral mission.

And so we might echo the words of St Paul in saying, Kevin before the world was made, you were chosen for this great responsibility of leading such a central aspect of our diocesan mission, oversight of the schools and work concerned with education. And perhaps at times, it seems as though you may have been doing this work since the world was made. There are few around these days, who can remember school life before Kevin McGinnell.

It seems right that we should reflect on the scriptures we have just shared together, from the perspective of the Church's ministry in education. This means

allowing the words of the Lord we have heard, to form and shape our understanding of what Catholic schools are about.

This is important. So much of Mgr Kevin's ministry has been concerned with the administration of temporal goods. To this end, he has been a diocesan trustee. But this is not the heart of our Catholic schools. Way back in 1977, the Holy See's Congregation for Education, published a document simply titled, *The Catholic School*. Here we read, 'The Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church... It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of the faithful, that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times.'

And so the Scriptures of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception present us with two images of learning. First of all, in the garden known as Eden, we hear how our first parents learnt fear and shame. It is these responses to the presence of God, by which the Lord knows that things have gone horribly wrong. Hiding from God is not meant to be our default position. We are created in the image and likeness of God, made to have an intimate friendship with the Lord. And so salvation in Christ is about restoring this intimacy and the wellbeing which springs from our friendship with Jesus. A Catholic school fulfils its mission when it draws from this spring of living water, enabling all, students and staff, to find that human freedom which is the glory of God fully alive.

One of the most beautiful images of salvation in the Gospel is when the Greek-speakers come to Philip with a simply put request, sir we wish to see Jesus. Our schools should help all within their communities to meet with the Lord and to find the life which only he is able to offer us.

Which brings us to another place, not a garden, but the humble home of Mary of Nazareth. Here is a young woman who does not hide from the living God. Again, we might listen to this Gospel moment from the perspective of education. As you know the word education is derived from a Latin verb meaning to lead out. Education does not happen unless someone wants to learn, and it is a leading out to a new place of understanding.

The dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary is deeply educational. The angel respects the one to whom he has been sent. There is a profound dialogue of proclamation, invitation and patient waiting until God's request is accepted. The angel recognises the challenges to this young woman as she learns God's will, and invites her not to be disturbed. On Mary's part, she is open to learn more. She asks questions. She begins a journey of life-long learning and enters fully into this journey. She does not hold back, she is open to the will of the Lord.

There is so much for us to ponder in this Gospel moment of the Annunciation. O that every lesson in our schools echoed this dialogue between messenger and disciple. The mystics, such as St Bernard of Clairvaux,

understood the implications of this moment. This is what Bernard said, 'You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us. The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent. In the eternal Word of God we all came to be, and behold, we die. In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life.'

St John Henry Newman was very concerned with the formation of young people. And of course, Mgr Kevin was himself educated at St Philip's Grammar School in Birmingham, next door to Newman's Oratory.

In so many ways, the aesthetic theology of John Henry Newman, musician, novelist, letter-writer, homilist, echoes the beauty we find in the account of the annunciation. The dialogue between the angel and Our Lady is the story of a journey into deeper trust and openness to God's will. A revelation only becomes fully so, when it is heard with reverence and responded to with obedience.

All this may seem very remote from our day-to-day experience of our schools. But beauty has something more to offer than the true and the good. Beauty is a transcendental which attracts and encourages. I imagine Our Lady listening to the angel with the ear of someone attracted to a sublime piece of music.

Kevin, it is a great joy for us to be able to gather together this evening. We do so on the eve of this great Feast, we do so to give thanks for your long and patient ministry with our diocesan schools. And no pressure, but I feel sure it is only a matter of time before we hear, one of those schools has dedicated a new place of learning as the McGinnell Centre.