

## Diocese of Nottingham

# "You Are Living Stones"

## Homily 2

22 January 2012



For many weeks now, there seem to have been a number of programmes on TV about the second world war, and particularly about the heroic escapades of soldiers at a time when the odds against them were seemingly overwhelming. Desperate times, they say, call for desperate measures, and that certainly seems to have been true in the early 1940s for British servicemen and women and their allies.

As we listened to the passage from near the start of St. Mark's gospel, we may be struck by a similar theme. John had been preaching a baptism of repentance, and many God-fearing people had gone to listen to him and to heed his advice; and John had baptized Jesus; but now John had been arrested – a very clear sign that the powers of evil were ready to fight against anyone who successfully proclaimed the Word of God and lead people to follow God's ways.

It is from such episodes that we should all take heart. In the Church we may well feel that we are under threat from all sides, that all is in decline. A group of solicitors has again been attacking the Church over its past history of failure to deal properly with abuse of children and young people. There are continual threats to our system of Catholic schools. Our prayers for unity among Christians do not appear to be bearing a great deal of fruit: as we celebrate the annual week of prayer for Christian unity, we may well feel as far away from unity in faith and love as we have been for many years. And as Bishop Malcolm has reminded us, we are faced with a declining number of priests in the foreseeable future to proclaim the Word of God, to lead prayers and administer the sacraments, to gather and care for the Christian community.

So we take note of the actions of Our Lord: hearing of the death of John, he proclaimed a message of hope: the time has come; the kingdom is at hand; so repent and believe the good news. In our own time, we also stay with this same message of hope.

The time has come to reflect on the state of the Church in our country, in our diocese, in our deanery, in our parish; and to do so with the message of our Lord in the forefront of our minds: the kingdom is at hand, repent, and believe the good news. We know that our reflections are not unaided: the Holy Spirit is with us to be our courage, wisdom, inspiration. So we can reflect in hope, that although there are difficult times ahead, God has promised that he is always with us. We begin our reflections by taking stock of where we are now, and how we have come to be here. Our parish community has a history, which is briefly told on the parish website. We must not lose sight of this history. It reminds us that there was a time, not all that long ago, when the Catholic community in this part of Leicestershire celebrated Mass once a week in an upper room in a pub! Our own church was opened only 54 years ago, and as a parish we are not yet 50 years old. We can and must thank God for all the encouragement that we have received as this community has built up over the years.

**On this basis, we should first of all ask ourselves; what can we say about our Catholic community now?**

**How could we best describe our parish?**

**What goes on here?**

**What does the parish do?**

**If the parish was not here, what would we miss?**

**What is our faith and our hope in the parish of St. Pius X in 2012?**

**How do we show our love for God and for one another?**

**How is our Catholic faith preached and proclaimed?**

**What Christian witness do we give to others?**

**How do we celebrate the sacraments?**

**How do we give praise and glory to God?**

**How do we pray, individually and in groups, formally and informally? How do we relate to other Christian communities, members of other religions, and those of no faith?**

**How do we look after one another?**

**How do we reach out to others?**

**How do we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, comfort the bereaved, and bury the dead?**

In order to provide Bishop Malcolm with a good basis for providing pastoral care for this parish community, we need to be able to give an account of where we are as a Christian community, and of where we would like to be. For the moment, we need to concentrate on looking at ourselves as the Catholic community in Narborough and District, and then in a week or so we will start to consider where we wish to be, how we would like to think of ourselves, how we would like others to see us, and how we are going to progress to put this vision of ourselves into effect.

We are not alone in this endeavour. Bishop Malcolm has asked all parishes and all Catholic communities in the diocese to engage with him in these reflections. He will write to us all in early Lent, by which time we hope our reflections will have moved on a long way. But we are also joined with other parishes and communities in our Deanery of West Leicester, and as part of these reflections we will have the opportunity for a day of talking and discussing the themes of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life; the role of the lay person, the deacon, and the priest in our parishes and other communities; and ways in which we will all work together so that Christ may be formed in us, we may listen to his call to us just as the first disciples who left their nets and their fish and their boats to follow him, and so that God's Kingdom, which is at hand, will be built in our parish and flourish among us.