

## **Words of gratitude from the new Bishop of Waterford & Lismore, Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan**

The words of Saint Augustine come to mind today: "For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace." I am humbled to have been chosen for this task as bishop but I do not walk the way on my own. We, all of us, walk together, trusting, not in our own strength but in the power of God.

The Jesus I know does not reject us but is continually on our side, welcoming us. He does not only welcome winners, or perfect people or just make us feel good. He welcomes everyone. He is with us. He proves this by being born in a simple stable and living an ordinary life working in a carpenter's workshop most of His life and proves it further by dying on the Cross. All this fills my heart today. I sense immense gratitude to God for His faithfulness. I know that I am a sinner, yet I experience the love and mercy of Jesus in this deeper call to service in His Church.

I pray that I be a worthy successor to Bishop Willie Lee. We all thank him, for his whole-hearted dedication to the diocese over the past twenty years. We pray for God's blessing on this next stage of his ministry.

On this first occasion of speaking as your Bishop in this Cathedral I warmly greet the family of our diocese: laymen and women, religious, seminarians, our deacon, and priests. Thank you for the kind and hospitable welcome that you have already shown me. To all the priests of the diocese, I want to say how much I look forward to meeting you personally and getting to know you; know that you always have my support. You do a great job in the day-to-day bits and pieces of parish life. The fact that I am your bishop will not prevent us, I hope, from being brothers. As I stand here with this crozier – a replica of the beautiful Lismore crozier I am reminded of what it signifies – the shepherd doing his work and as Pope Francis has famously reminded us – we should know "the smell of the sheep"!

It is a great joy to have our deacon Shane with us; you are a sign of hope and of the generosity of our young people. I am convinced that there are many more, who with the right encouragement, can be helped to make life commitments in the Church whether that be to marriage, religious life, the permanent diaconate (and we look forward to the ordination of Lazarus later in the summer), or the priesthood. Let us all continue to pray and work in promoting these vocations.

From my youth I knew a kind of dialogue with a living God thanks in large part to my parents and to countless others along the way. This dialogue continued into priesthood and the 'yes' I make today is part of the 'yes' I made in 1994 in Saint John's Cathedral in Limerick where I was ordained a priest.

Each person is made for God and by God. Each of us is a beloved child of the Father, and called to be with Him forever. This day – Divine Mercy Sunday – is a wonderful day, a day chosen by the Lord himself to tell the whole world of his limitless mercy and love. No matter who we are or what we have done in the past, God's heart is aching until we turn to Him in complete trust. Let us not be proud or stiff-necked or think that we can 'go it alone' and live without God. This will only lead to confusion, darkness and

sin. And as we look around our country today we can see so many signs of this. We need God. How many among us seek fulfilment and meaning in all sorts of places, in the wrong places, in a kind of desperate search for inner peace? And cut ourselves off from the vine and wither on the ground. While, all the while, that fulfilment and meaning and peace are waiting for us all in the heart of Jesus. Let us go to Jesus and speak with Him who is waiting for us all the time – like the father of the prodigal son watching out to see his son return. And when we speak with Him, build up a relationship with Him and are filled with Him, then we can go out and tell the world about Him and go to those who – even if they seem far from Him – are equally God’s children and brothers and sisters of the Lord, and of ours. Out of love of Jesus we put ourselves at the service of others especially those most in need in our society: the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, those who feel alienated from God, and those on the margins.

We reach out to those who have turned away from the practice of the faith, many of whom are in our own families and parish communities. How can we walk with them in a way that will help them to see once more the beauty of following Jesus? We are called to step out from the doors of the Church to bring Christ to all we meet. This is our mission: to be filled with Christ and to bring Him to others. Christ has no body now but yours and mine.

I know that there is much that I have to learn about our diocese, our people and about being a bishop. There is much I do not know. But I do know that God is in charge and God has a plan for us all. Little did my father think as he walked the streets of Waterford over seventy years ago while studying in De la Salle Teacher Training College that one day a son of his would be bishop of this historic and beautiful diocese! God indeed has a plan. He knows what He is about. Have we the courage to trust in Him? Another thing I know is me being your bishop is part of God’s plan. With His help, and your prayers, may I fulfil His plan.

As we begin this work we seek the loving intercession of Our Mother Mary and our diocesan patrons: Declan and Otteran and Carthage, and also of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, and indeed we ask the help of all those many unnamed saints whom we have known who are gone before marked with the sign of faith.

So let us walk together and in the words of the brave young Donal Walsh so we can “climb God’s mountain.” Go raibh maith agaibh agus beannacht Dé oraibh go léir.