

Father Ignatius of Llanthony

Address given by the Right Reverend Dominic Walker at the Father Ignatius Memorial Trust Pilgrimage on August 19th 2017

The second lesson this evening has Peter saying to Jesus, 'But what about us?' Peter had seen someone refuse Jesus' invitation to follow him, so Peter wanted to know what he and the other disciples were going to get out of following him and Jesus deals with Peter quite brilliantly. He begins by assuring him that anyone who leaves home and family for the sake of Jesus and the good news will get rewarded a hundredfold, but he also warns him that those who follow him will face persecutions and that many who are first will be last, and the last first. Peter should not be ambitious for himself but for the kingdom.

The early Christians soon discovered the dangers they faced by following Jesus and many were disowned and disinherited – they left everything – home, family and wealth - to follow Jesus and were welcomed into a new family showing that for Christians blood is *not* thicker than water because the waters of baptism make us members of a large family in earth and heaven.

Last month, Brother Michael Bartlett, a fellow member of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd and I attended a conference at Lee Abbey – it was a conference designed to bring together what was described as 'old and 'new' monasticism. As the Oratory of the Good Shepherd was founded over 100 years ago we were classified as being 'old' as our grey hair demonstrated all too clearly! In contrast, many of the so-called 'new' monastic communities were attracting lively and enthusiastic young people, some single, some married, some Anglicans and some of other denominations. The conference was an exciting attempt to celebrate the old and the new and to discover what we could learn from one another.

The older communities reflected on their founders and their intentions and eccentricities whilst the new communities often had founders who were still alive and in leadership. Somehow, I could not but help reflect on the similarities and differences between what is happening today and what happened when Father Ignatius attempted to found the Religious Life in the Church of England. At our conference the Archbishop of Canterbury sent a video message of support and there were representatives from the Community of St Anselm and the Chemin Neuf community, both of which are based at Lambeth Palace. But for Father Ignatius, his desire to live the monastic life in the English Church was met by episcopal opposition, suspicion and ridicule but he appeared undeterred and maybe he was encouraged by those words of Jesus to Peter that those who give up all to follow Christ will face persecution but will also be rewarded.

Perhaps some would see Father Ignatius' attempt to establish the Religious Life as something of a failure when so few of those who came to test their vocations made a life commitment and then appearing to shoot himself in the foot by receiving the priesthood at the hands of an irregular bishop. But I think there can be no doubt that his association with Edward Pusey and Lydia Sellon was instrumental in that painful process to establish the Consecrated Life in the Church of England. He also had the vision of establishing a First Order of Monks living in a monastery, a Second Order for those living the consecrated life in their own homes and a Third Order for those wishing to live a disciplined Rule of Life.

Last month at Lee Abbey, it was a joy to see young people feeling called to live a consecrated

life even if only for a limited time. There was only one moment when the difference between the 'old' and the 'new' became evident and that was when one evening after Compline when we sang the *Salve Regina* in Latin and only the oldies could manage it. The rest of the time there was a sense of unity – of people who were prepared to give all to follow Christ in worship, service and mission. The evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience are binding on all Christians because they concern our three relationships: poverty - our relationship with possessions, chastity - our relationship with others and obedience - our relationship with God, although they are lived out by monks and nuns in a particular way.

Today, there are thousands of people who are affiliated as members of Third Orders, (over two thousand Franciscan tertiaries) as Companions, Oblates and Associates of religious communities gaining their inspiration and support from the lives of people like St Benedict, St Augustine, St Francis and St Clare and those traditional Anglican communities that can trace the founding of the consecrated life in the Anglican Communion today to people like Father Ignatius, Mother Lydia and Dr Pusey.

Peter asked Jesus his question because he had seen the rich young man refuse Jesus' invitation to follow him. We are told that Jesus looked on him and loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor ... then come, follow me'. But we are told that the young man was shocked and went away sad because he had many possessions. Jesus saw that he didn't just possess his possession, his possessions possessed him, and we all have to consider what prevents us from following Jesus more closely and I can't help feeling that that is a question Father Ignatius, monk and popular mission preacher, might well be asking us if he was preaching today. Amen.