



Our Families

The Hope when we pray for our families, our sons and daughters, grandchildren, that as husband and wife they keep close to each other and to God, and when we pray for our grandchildren that Our Lord will keep them in his care and from all harm.

In Hope we pray for the needs and wants of others and hope that God will answer our prayers. Sometimes when we don't get the answer we want, our hope is dashed, because we forget prayer is not like a vending machine, where you put in a request and get an instant answer – if only.

Let me bring the question of Hope a little closer to each one of us. What hopes do we have for our Association? Should we have any?

I think we can gain great hope from St Paul, one of our Patron Saints. St Paul stood by, giving approval when St Stephen was stoned.

St Paul spent a lot of his time, some may say all of his time, persecuting Christians and yet there was hope; he became the greatest missionary Christianity has ever known, ultimately sacrificing his life for Christ. Is there a greater sign of hope?

A Moving Story

Back in July last year I read in the Arundel & Brighton Diocesan newspaper, a very moving story of Hope listed, among the long list of 'answered prayers', and preserved in the ancient chronicles at the shrine of St Lewina, the Sussex Martyr.

It's written that around 800 years ago there was a young woman who had been disabled and bedridden for three years. Having heard of the "signs" worked by St Lewina she asked her parents to take her to the shrine where that night in the Church the saint's relics were resting.

In hope she prayed for a special blessing and was then carried home. It's detailed in the chronicles that the next day she woke early, asked for a bath and her best clothes.

Her family were excited, this was so very different from her normal day and they waited eagerly and excitedly, as, with renewed strength, the girl plaited her hair, something she had not done for a very long time. She put on her favourite jewellery, thanked St Lewina for answering her prayers, lay back on the bed and died.

This story for me speaks of immense hope, in fact transcending beyond Hope into the reality of enlightened faith.

FAITH

Brothers the final part of my Conference theme is: Faith.

FAITH - is very personal, a one to one relationship with God. In these days in which we live there is little doubt our Faith and relationship with God is, and will be, continuously challenged. Catholics and Christians living in this country and other Western countries, are unlikely to face the same fate Saints Peter and Paul suffered, but unmistakably there are parts of the world not so far away where being Christian results in ridicule, persecution and sometimes death.

In March 2009 Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor in an address on his vision of our Church said, I quote, "The greatest danger for us at the moment, is to let ourselves believe what secular culture wants us to believe about ourselves, namely, as a Church that we are becoming less and less influential and in decline".

Let me repeat and underline those last few words, "we are becoming less influential and in decline". Does 1908 ring a bell? The Cardinal goes on to warn us we must never accept this consensually or by default. Brothers, I have no doubt we are facing challenges individually and collectively, hence my opening question "Whither goest thou?"

Encourage and Affirm

I believe our Association has a very valuable role to play in today's society and our Church. I'm not talking about collective Catholic Action, nor placard bearing, trumpeting demonstrations, but I am however talking about the need to encourage and affirm each other as we do in Love, Hope, Friendship and Faith. Our Association gives us this opportunity and the strength to do so, but we cannot, we must not, be content to keep it to ourselves. I go further, we have a duty, a responsibility to share it. I remind you, St Paul tells us, "Love is not love until you give it away". Let's then share what we are blessed with, receive and enjoy. I am reminded of the words of the hymn we will be singing tomorrow:

*Freely Freely you have received
Freely Freely give.*

*Go in my name and because you believe
Others will know that I live.*

Membership

Brothers, in conclusion I have a challenge, I want to share our Association, what it stands for and all it offers, with as many of our fellow

Catholics eligible to join us, but not yet members. I am looking with your help to increase our membership during the next 12 months by 2010 new members. I have picked the figure 2010, yes, the year we are in, so that every time we write, read or say the date or year 2010 it will remind us of the challenge. Impossible! Too big a task! In the words of Margaret Thatcher I say "No, no, no, I firmly believe it is in our grasp, but we must act now." 2010 new members broken down per circle equates to just six new Brothers per circle.

I hope, there's that word again, hope, the presentations later this morning by the President of Province 19 Brother Brian Towler and Province 19's Membership Officer Brother Chris Richards will help us. I would like each circle (if necessary assisted by its Province or Area Council) to have a specific plan for membership. I ask Provincial and Area Councils to consolidate the plans, discuss their circles' membership activity and progress with the Director of Province, enabling each Director to make a report at Grand Council Meetings. After which the Chairman of the Membership Work Group will précis the reports for publication in Catena, on a quarterly basis.

International Membership Trophy

I am introducing an annual International Membership Trophy and will present it for the first time at the Annual Conference next year in Newcastle to the circle that has achieved the highest number of new enrolments, excluding joint members. If there is a tie there will be a 'Tie Break' factor. I will be asking our Rules and Regulations, Policy and Procedure Working Group to draw up simple rules. Finally Brothers, some of you will know of my love for music.... no don't worry, I'm tempted but I'm not going to burst into song.... phew that was close, but I end with the words of a song from one of my favourite musical films

*Climb every mountain
Search high and low
Follow every by-way
Every path you know
A dream that will need
All the love you can give
Every day of your life
For as long as you live.*

My dear Brothers, Whither goest thou? wherever that may be, May God Bless you, your families and all your dreams of Love – Hope – Faith.

Thank you