



## ***Homily for Our Lady's Birthday***

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*Society of Mary Celebration, St Thomas Liscard*

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Firstly it is good to be here, at last! My thanks to Fr Nelson for his kind invitation and my apologies to Fr Nelson for my late arrival, and to Fr Brooks whose coach we should have been on. Frantic and lost but we finally have arrived!

As you may well know, I have recently been appointed as Priest in Charge at S.Luke's Church, Southport, and one of the things that S.Luke's have asked for from their new priest is a daily mass. This I have dutifully responded to and so far, so good, people have come, to the mass, the source and summit of our faith. One of the things I like to do at midweek celebrations, should the Spirit move me, is to give a very short homily reflecting upon the gospel or the saint of the day. We celebrate the mass in the Lady Chapel, and directly above the lectern in the chapel is the first station of the cross, which when I go to the lectern I am very aware of the single word written upon it: "Condemned", whether I am or not remains to be seen, I do hope not!

However as in most churches, the church has a Lady Chapel, it is here that the mass is often celebrated midweek in our churches. It is here that a wonderful image of Our Lady can be found, a statue, an icon, Fr Nelson has a rather nice icon of Our Lady here which might disappear if I can get close enough! But in the churches here represented today, Saint Thomas, S.Agnes, S James, S Paul, all of those churches have beautiful images of Our Lady. This image draws

us in, the beauty of the young mother holding her child, very often we light our candles and pin our hopes upon Mary addressing her Son on our behalf. We are drawn because these images are attractive, Mary is attractive. And yet, the young girl who accepts God's will in her life, who becomes the Mother of the Lord, the one who feeds him and dresses him and teaches him right from wrong, who gives him a clout when he steps out of line, who follows him when he begins his public ministry and appears to have lost his sense and ultimately follows him to the cross, after he has been tormented and beaten. Mary is the one who follows, who is there. But by this time surely she would not be the young attractive image we portray in our churches, dripping in jewels and lace? Presumably iconographers and statue makers would not sell so many items if Mary was portrayed 'warts and all', possibly as an old little Jewish Momma, of course there is still something attractive about her, but it is her character, her personality that really draws us, a book can never be judged by its cover!

As we journey on our faith journey in life, many of us like to go to Walsingham. This mirrors our earthly journey to the heavenly realm. We know that when we enter into the shrine church we can make our way to Mary's Holy House. In there after our long journey we know that we can be 'at home' with the Mother of the Lord. We know that we do not go there to worship Mary or an image of her, but we do know at the heart is an image. However that image correctly portrays Our Lady holding her Son, in fact sat upon her lap and that when we enter into the Holy House Mary proudly presents to us her Son. We in fact are drawn to Mary, we are attracted to her as we are in our churches when we light our candles and say our prayers but it is never Mary we are seeking divinely, that would be heresy! No, it is her Son, who she presents to us that we are seeking, we know that a journey to her is to encounter Jesus, we go to Mary's shrine to see her and her Son, it is he who is at the heart of Walsingham and he, and ultimately of course is his Father, Our Father God, who we are seeking to engage and experience. We are drawn

not by plaster or wood, but by the Mother of God, Mary most holy who proudly shows us her Son.

On this Mary's birthday, we rightly gather to sing her praises; she leaves to her Son's church the prime example of how to accept God's will in our lives. She simply says 'yes' and trusts in the Lord, she who from her birth was set apart to do God's will, just as we are called to do God's will, just as we who call themselves Christian should strive and seek to serve the Lord. Yes, it is a bumpy road, yes it's not all singing all dancing, but yes it is real, the incarnation is real, Jesus is real and alive and active and all because Mary shows us the way in how to discern and live out God's will for all of us, as we journey towards his kingdom.

It is important that in our churches we have images of Our Lady, however they may appear, beautiful and decorated but we must never lose sight of why those images are there. Not to be worshipped but to be engaged with, because these images convey significance greater than we can first perceive, we have to delve deep into the mystery of our faith to comprehend the meaning behind the image. A young girl, a mother, a woman wounded? Whatever they portray let us be like Mary being able to know and understand that Jesus is our Lord and our God. This is the key to Mary's understanding of her son, her boy who grew into the man who brought salvation to the world, and that Mary the great Mother of God was the one who bore salvation into the world, by accepting God's will and delving deep into the mystery of God's love for us and our faith and her faith.

Amen.