

Adoremus - National Eucharistic Congress in Liverpool

A Parishioner's Perspective

The last National Eucharistic Congress held in England was in 1908, at a time when the people we read in an edition of the Spectator were “by temperament and conviction distrustful of anything that smacks of Popery.” In our time, we could reasonably suggest, anything that smacks of religion. Certainly I witnessed both bewildered and amused expressions as Liverpool attempted to comprehend why the streets and coffee shops were full of priests and religious. Beyond the amusement however I could sense something a little deeper and more uncomfortable in their eyes, the same discomfort we all experience when the sacred begins to penetrate our personal space. These moments prompt a personal yielding, they are awkward, beautiful opportunities, and I’m quite certain many souls were stirred by the public witness, and prayers of the faithful, as we processed penitentially through the pouring rain, aglow in the light, warmth and love of Jesus Christ truly present in the Blessed Sacrament.

The following is a brief summary of my personal experience of the Saturday and Sunday; the Congress and Pilgrimage days, and a short commentary on the main themes of the keynote talks given by Bishop Robert Barron.

I don’t know Liverpool very well, so I was careful to allow time to get from the station to the venue, and after an initial half hearted phone-sat-nav moment I spotted a confidently walking priest, introduced myself, and accompanied him to the arena.

Upon arrival I was delighted to receive a Catholic Goodie Bag, or Welcome Pack containing amongst other things an Adoremus Candle, and a booklet with the liturgies for the day. I then found a cracking seat and settled down, smiling to myself as I noticed the person’s phone next to me had a Marian screen saver. Seriously, amongst the day-to-day secular wilderness these little moments are heartening reminders that you’re not alone in getting excited about a new menu section being added to the Divine Office App. This said it was lovely to see so many different people gathered together under one roof; laity of all ages, priests, and religious, a visceral presence of the Church Universal.

We began proceedings with an opening prayer, and the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Edward Adams greeted the delegates, and gave the Holy Father’s message and blessing. We then welcomed Bishop Robert Barron, for the first of his two keynote speeches. The topic; **Holy Mass**.

He began by acknowledging the challenging times the Church is currently living through, with a re-affirmation and reminder that we must always focus on the fundamentals of our faith; Christ in the Eucharist, and to live out the Vatican II proclamation - *that Holy Mass is the source and summit of Christian life* - through full, active and conscious participation.

He reminded us also that Christianity isn't a philosophy, it is a relationship; a friendship with Jesus Christ, and there is no more intense encounter than the Mass. Elaborating on the idea of friendship, he commented that, when we invite friends over for dinner, we converse, and then we eat, so too in the Mass.

He then went on to speak of how the elements of the Mass, from vestments to candles, are concrete things that bring us into contact with a divine reality, and how the Mass is truly "*the supreme form of adoration.*"

"The term "adoration" comes from the Latin *ad oratio*, which in turn is derived from "ad ora" (to the mouth). To adore, therefore, is to be mouth to mouth with God, properly aligned to the divine source, breathing in God's life."

He spoke of the master theme of the Bible being precisely that of adoration, God teaching, first Israel, and then the whole world how to properly adore the Lord, and from this he suggests, by implication, when we adore anything other than God, pleasure, honour, wealth, power, we are so to speak "mouth to mouth," with those things. As a consequence we dis-integrate, and chaos breaks out in and around us. When we are aligned to God, rightly ordered within; when we adore Him alone, peace breaks out in and around us.

Finally he invited us to reflect on the Mass as the great "call and response" between Christ the Head, and each of us - the members of His Mystical Body. He used the great love poem of the Bible, the Song of Songs to convey this divine interplay, as lover and Beloved call and respond to one another, through the prayers, readings and responses.

The fruit being a oneness, a perfect unity in the love of the Spouse for His bride the Church.

The second keynote speech concerned **Sainthood, and what makes us Holy.**

He summarised centuries of spiritual teaching by focusing on three essential elements of what it means to be a Christian; find the centre, know that you're a sinner and realise your life is not about you. I won't go into all three elements here, but I would like to share a little of the commentary on the first element; *find the centre.*

He shared his experience of wonderment as he gazed at the rose window in the Cathedral of Notra-Dame, Paris and how these windows convey an important spiritual message. At the very centre we always see Christ, and around the centre, ordered, harmonious patterns. So too when Christ is, unambiguously, and without competition, the centre of our lives, the whole of our life falls into harmony around the centre.

He also made reference to another type of wheel sometimes seen in medieval cathedrals. The wheel of fortune. In these windows, as I understand it, we see depicted at the top, the figure of a king reigning, as we move around the outside of the wheel we see the same figure no longer reigning, at the base of the wheel, he has nothing, and as we move up the outside of the wheel again, he is going to reign... That's life! Sometimes we're up, sometimes we're down, and the wheel of fortune keeps on turning.

Now, as in all the rose windows, the wheel of fortune has a centre, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. The beautiful spiritual point being; “don’t live your life on the rim of the wheel!”

He rightly suggested that it is precisely where we do spend much of our time, and it makes us anxious, crazy and unhappy. When we live in the centre; in Christ, the one who loves us no matter what, we can watch the wheel spinning undisturbed.

There were also several other talks, discussions, and presentations, each focusing on the centrality of the Eucharist in the context of Mission and Evangelisation.

At the close of the Congress Day, we heard a reflection by Cardinal Vincent Nichols. We then prayed Evening Prayer of Corpus Christi together, preceded, and followed by a period of Adoration. The day concluded with Benediction.

It was a wonderful thing to behold thousands of chatting people suddenly and without instruction fall silent, as the Blessed Sacrament entered the arena.

The following Pilgrimage Day, was a most special and moving occasion.

Holy Mass was celebrated at the wonderful Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, followed immediately by the Eucharistic Procession through the streets of Liverpool.

A quick mention must be made to the musical arrangements, and choirs who participated; truly beautiful. The day concluded at the steps of the Cathedral with Benediction.

The whole Adoremus event was an opportunity to focus on the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. To adore Him, to thank Him, to think about Him, to love Him. Nothing is of greater value.

Another joyful site on both days, was the Statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, who also accompanied her children through the streets of Liverpool during the procession.

You may already know that the Statue of Our Lady will be visiting all the cathedrals of England as part of the spiritual preparations for England’s re-dedication as the Dowry of Mary in 2020.

So, to conclude on a personal note, my life, I imagine like yours, is a messy business much of the time, clambering up and down the rim of the wheel, but there are, thanks be to God periods of time each week, when I sit silently before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. When I do this, I want for nothing. Nothing at all, save that the world would know and love Him. My anxieties slip away, my fears, my material yearnings, there’s just the God who made me, loves me and saved me. In these moments before our Lord in the Eucharist, I truly believe, if our hearts are willing, that we are schooled in all things, learn all things, and, in the tiniest of ways, begin to love on earth, as we will forever in heaven.

Our Parish has regular opportunities for Adoration each week.

Please see the bulletin, or check the website for details.

It is a very worthwhile practice to go to Adoration for someone who isn’t able; those in persecuted lands, or who are prevented through ill health, please do consider doing this.