

Homily
Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State
Diamond Jubilee Mass – Fr Len Kofler MHM
Institute of Saint Anselm, Wednesday 8 May 2019

Dear Father Len,

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am delighted to be with you this afternoon to share in this double celebration: the inauguration of the Institute of Saint Anselm at its new home in Rome, and thanksgiving for Father Len Kofler's sixtieth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Thank you to Father Len and to all the staff and supporters of the Saint Anselm Institute for the invitation to be with you to share the Eucharist and give thanks for the abundant gifts of the Lord. I don't come empty-handed, but bring with me warm greetings from the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and extend his blessing to all of you here present.

We come together in this holy season of Eastertide when we bask in the glow of Easter light, that light which is the symbol of our new life in the Risen Christ. The Preface of the Easter liturgy speaks of being "overcome with Paschal joy", and that is our prayer as we listen to the Word of God and receive his body and blood. That joy of the present instant is held in tension between the past and the future in this moment of *anamnesis*, the liturgical celebration that allows us to enter into the Paschal Mystery. In fact, this joyful occasion brings together the two poles of our Christian experience: thanksgiving for the past, and hope in fresh beginnings. This is the reality of Easter, when we pass from what has gone before and are called to walk in the path of new life.

The Apostle Paul, addressing his favoured community in Philippi, speaks of joy, or rather he speaks *with* joy, for he recognizes in the nascent Philippian church God's grace working through the community. His joy,

however, is not a static or closed sentiment, a mere experience of satisfaction. No, this joy is in fact a catalyst, or as Pope Francis would say, a centrifugal force pushing outwards *from* the centre, so as to draw others into the centre of God's loving heart. Paul, then, is not content to remain in a state of mere sentimental appreciation, but instead, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he goes on to pray that their "*love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment*" (Phil 1:9).

Saint Paul's desire for the wellbeing of his spiritual children, and that extends also to us, is that they – that we – *be people who discern*. Discernment is an indispensable gift for those seeking to follow the Lord; without it, our discipleship would be little more than a fantasy, running the constant risk of becoming gushy, unchecked sentimentality, which favours personal choices over the will of the Lord in our lives.

Pope Francis speaks with characteristic clarity of the importance of discerning in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*: "*Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow*" (n. 169).

Pope Francis has a habit of expressing himself in ways that chime on a deep level, making us prick up the ears of our heart, if you will. As you heard that short passage from the Apostolic Exhortation, I would venture that you were thinking of the apostolate of the Saint Anselm Institute and, more particularly, the long and fruitful ministry of Father Len, who has walked with generations of "discerners".

The Holy Father spoke of "*heeding the promptings*" of God's grace and responding to "*his invitation to grow*". Wherever we are on our personal journey of faith – there is never an age for complacency – we should take those callings to heart, as we seek to grow into what Saint Paul describes as the "*fullness of the stature of Christ*" (Eph 4:13). As we try to respond, we

should remember that the Christian life is not a solitary endeavour; we walk together, accompanying each other along the way, with guides who, being sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, help us to discern on their journey of “formation”. I have no doubt we can all picture the person who, in a special way, prompted and guided us on our journey of vocation: a priest, or a religious, who – drawing on a wellspring of prayer – offered spiritual wisdom, human kindness and an example of charity. In so doing, almost unconsciously, they will have helped us discover the reality of God’s love and the call he addresses to each of us.

We heard how St Paul assured the beloved Philippians that he held them in his heart as partakers of the same grace (cf. *Phil.* 1:7), praying with and for them, sure that the Lord would bring to completion the good work he had started in them. The mission of the Saint Anselm Institute bears eloquent witness to St Paul’s certainty regarding the enduring value of accompanying others in growing in grace as they discern their way, so that they, in turn, can pass on the precious gift of discerning well.

Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that you chose Saint Anselm to be your patron. He is best remembered for his theological insights, expressed most famously in the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding” – faith comes first, as opposed to the other way around! It is vital to recall, however, that his influential work of theology was written, not as piece of abstract philosophy, but as a *prayer* – remember the primacy of faith! This saintly theologian and pastor reminds us that all our activity, our study and pastoral work, our contemplative and apostolic activity – all of it – must flow out of, and return to, an attitude of prayerful discernment. In the imagery Saint Matthew uses in the Gospel, this is the only way, we can be sure that we will always be “*salt of the earth*” that never loses its taste, and a “*light of the world*” that is never extinguished. If we are not firmly rooted in a regular, prayerful encounter with the living God, our daily choices will slowly drift away from Him, and our lives will become insipid and dull; saltless, lightless and, ultimately, Godless.

To follow the Spirit is no easy task; it requires faith *and* fortitude. Your holy Patron, Anselm, had both! Born in Aosta, he followed the Spirit's promptings to travel across the Alps and, eventually, the English Channel to become a great Archbishop of Canterbury. You have made the journey in reverse! Perhaps we can see here a providential sign in the transfer of the Saint Anselm Institute from London to Rome, seeking not your own will but that of the Master.

Saint Peter knew only too well the need for courage and fortitude in the life of faith, but only after a long period of discernment and formation! How the Lord's Eastertide words to Peter must have echoed also in Anselm's heart, challenging yet comforting him. And may they also echo within each of us: "*when you were young... you walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will fasten your belt for you and carry you where you do not wish to go*" (Jn 21:18). Through the intercession of Saints Peter and Anselm, we ask that we may always have the courage to respond generously to whatever the Lord asks of us.

We entrust ourselves in a particular way to the maternal protection of Our blessed Lady who, although "*greatly troubled*" at the words of the Angel (cf. *Luke 1:29*), said yes in total freedom to God's plan for her. Saint Anselm wrote these words: "*Lady, full and overflowing with grace, all creation receives new life from your abundance. Virgin, blessed above all creatures, through your blessing all creation is blessed, not only creation from its Creator, but the Creator himself has been blessed by creation.*" May the prayers and motherly love of Mary, open our hearts and minds to receive that abundance of blessing that the Lord wishes for us. Amen.