

Bishop Daly in his homily (printed below) encourages trust and confidence in the importance of parish and community for the building of faith in his homily on the 25th anniversary of the dedication of Our Lady of the Wayside Church, Broughderg in the parish of Greencastle.

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF OPENING OF OUR LADY OF THE WAYSIDE CHURCH, BROUGHERG

Our Lady of the Wayside Church, Broughderg, Greencastle

Wednesday September 1 2010

HOMILY

25 years ago, this date, September 1 was a Sunday – and on that day, this church was blessed and dedicated. It replaced the old St Mary’s Church that had served this community for the previous 100 years.

This church stands on what was traditionally for centuries a main route between north and south – for centuries people have travelled this way skirting the Sperrins to get from the North coast and County Derry to heart of mid-Ulster – medieval armies, landlords and tenants, emigrants leaving for the New World, people going to and returning from market, driving or transporting their cattle and sheep to fairs, people going to the bog, children going to school, people going to football matches, on their way to and fro – all passed this way at one time or another.

This new church was appropriately called Our Lady of the Wayside. That title has a long tradition in our faith - going right back to the beginning – there is a church in Rome called Santa Maria in Lata, Our Lady of the Wayside. It is located on one the main streets in modern Rome, which 2000 years ago, was one of the primary routes into central Imperial Rome. It goes right back to the beginnings of the Church. The church was first built 1500 years ago on the site of a house in which SS Peter and Paul lived and which also was associated with the evangelists, Luke and John. The church building in current use has been renovated many times, but it

is still in everyday use, right in the centre of the city. There are churches dedicated to Our Lady of the Wayside all over the world.

A church is not just a place to visit on Sundays – it is the home of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament – it is there to be visited every day – a place for the traveller or the passer-by to drop in a make a visit – to offer a prayer – to acknowledge the presence of God in our lives.

I checked back on the homily that I preached here 25 years ago. I spoke then of my concerns about the population here. I noted that in the 1880s, the population of Greencastle parish was about 2,500. The Catholic population of Greencastle parish in 1904 (the earliest year for which we have reliable diocesan records) was 1,940 – ten years later in 1914, the population was 1,764 – in 1977 the Catholic population of the parish was less than 950 and in 1985 it was just over 1,000. During the last 25 years, the parish population seems to have stabilised – although rural population here in the diocese generally is declining and it is also ageing.

This church building was an act of faith, as was the building which it replaced – an act of faith by a community, by a parish, by a district of a parish, an act of faith in the value of rural life here in Ireland - an act of faith in the permanence of this community here. It is the life of its rural people which has always given Ireland its unique flavour. The life of the rural people in nearly every European country is usually the key to the true cultural identity of that country. Cities and large towns are becoming more and more similar and cosmopolitan - they are inclined to ape one another and usually manage to adopt the worst cultural qualities of cities in other countries. There is a sameness about them – you can go into any large town now and find the same shops that you find in the High Street of any other town. The unique distinctive qualities of many towns is fading. The maintenance of strong, healthy and vital rural communities, with their own traditions, customs and

culture are of vital importance to any country and they are particularly important here in Ireland where they are being more and more endangered.

Parish and community are very important here in Ireland – it is what gives us of our identity – after the home, it is somewhere where we belong – if we travel to another part of the world, we still harken back to the community in which we born – one of the great strengths of the GAA, for example, is that is parish based community based – a major part of its success is that it recognised the identity that parish generates and built on that – so it is important to preserve those values and unique identity that parish and community offers us. And the Greencastle club brought great glory to the parish in March 2007 by being the first Tyrone club to win an All Ireland championship.

The community of faith that the parish offers, however large or small, is a microcosm of the Church as a whole – embracing all ages, all sexes, all classes – where everyone is welcome and where, ideally people live as sisters and brothers in Christ, offering support to one another, and respecting one another, through good times and bad. The social gospel that Jesus preached is best expressed in parish context and in a family context.

And here in this corner of Tyrone, for generations, the people of this area have come to a church building here on this crossroads to worship God, to pause, to pray; they have come to have their children baptised, to be married, to bury their dead – to celebrate the great Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter and Pentecost every year – to celebrate Mass as a community each weekend - to honour the faith that we are privileged to share.

We celebrate tonight another quarter century of history in this parish. We ask the Lord to guide us and watch over us during the coming quarter century which, I anticipate, will be extremely challenging for both Church and community.

Undaunted, we face into this period with same confidence and trust and generosity as the people who built the original church here 125 years ago, and those that built this church here 25 years ago.