

Homily delivered on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 by the Rt Revd Mgr Keith Newton  
Ordinary of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham  
The Convent, Old Oscott  
Mary, Mother of God

***As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered in her heart.***

The Lambeth Conference in 2008, attended by both Fr Andrew and myself, was not, I have to admit, the most enjoyable two weeks of my life. I was discerning my own future in the Church of England and being present at Canterbury was particularly difficult. There were, however, a couple highlights notably by non-Anglican participants. The first was an address on 'Covenant' by the then Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sachs, and the other an address on 'Mission, Social Justice and Evangelisation' by Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, sometimes called Propaganda Fide. His address attracted press comment because he talked about the dangers of what he called spiritual Alzheimer's – living in the present and forgetting about ones roots in the apostolic Church. It was perhaps not the most politically correct comment but it certainly hit home and reminded me why I was finding life as an Anglican so difficult.

During the course of the address he spoke of the role and image of our Lady and how she can teach 'Christians how to be truly Spirit-filled and Spirit-led by imitating her singular virtues of *Fiat, Magnificat and Stabat*'

Today the Church puts Mary, the Mother of God, before us at the beginning of a New Year perhaps reminding us that she can uniquely, though simply and effectively, teach us how to follow her son as his disciples. When we look at her we can see what it means to for all of us to be 'Christ bearers' in the world.

It is also a particularly fitting day, the Anniversary of our reception, yours and mine, into the full communion of the Catholic Church, to erect, with the permission of the Holy See, your community of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a monastery of Benedictine Spirituality under the jurisdiction of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. So it is a day of joy and thanksgiving for you and the whole Ordinariate as well as the wider Catholic Church. It is also an appropriate day to mark a new beginning especially for a community under the maternal care of the Mother of God.

I thought I might then pin my few thoughts on those three words given by Cardinal Dias in his address.

The first, FIAT, is about willingly and obediently saying 'Yes' to God wherever that might lead. We should not make the mistake of thinking that Mary's 'fiat' at the annunciation meant she fully understood the significance of her son's life. She must have pondered, as today's gospel reminds us, from that moment through his ministry and ultimately through his passion and death. She must have reasserted that 'Yes' on many occasions. We too must be always reasserting our willingness to faithfully follow him.

I have recently re-read the paper given by Mother Winsome to a Conference of consecrated religious earlier in the year which sets out something of your own response to God's call over recent years; of how you have followed in Mary's footsteps in responding to the Lord who sometimes calls us from a place of comfort and security to one of discomfort and insecurity. All of us who have responded to the Pope Benedict's Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* have had to face sacrifices in some form other but for you, sisters, there has been something remarkable. You have left the security of your Convent and the friendship of fellow community members, I won't say former Sisters because I imagine you still see them as your sisters, in order to set out on a new religious life and set up a new Institute of Consecrated Life in full communion with the See of Peter. For us your example has been an inspiration. Nor can I promise that this will be the end; you must constantly continue to say Yes to God as you bring the vision you have before to you to fruition.

Then there is MAGNIFICAT, the prayerful song of Mary. The praise of God for his many blessings has, even through the last difficult two years, been the centre of your life. The Community of the Virgin Mary to which you formerly belonged founded by William Butler, Vicar of Wantage, was originally an Augustinian foundation, though centred on a life of prayer, praise and personal holiness, did much apostolic work both in England and overseas. For myself I remember a children's Mission in my home parish in Liverpool in the 60s run by Sister Margaret Clare, I think, a formidable sister. One of the other members of the team was Sister Helen Philippa who lodged in our home. But now with prayer and under God's guidance you have moved to a Benedictine and more contemplative way of life; a direction in which the community has been moving for some years. At the centre of that life will be prayer and work. Much of that prayer will be communal - the *opus Dei*; the work of God, as it is called, will be at the centre of your life. For us you will be the praying heart of the Ordinariate. We will value your presence and we hope be recipients of your hospitality.

We are told in today's Gospel that Mary **'treasured all these things and pondered in her heart'**.

When Pope Paul VI wrote his Apostolic Exhortation, *Maria Cultus*, he described our Lady by that beautiful phrase, the attentive Virgin. He pointed out that the certainty of her faith flowed from her contemplative life. I know what it means to "ponder" in one's head. It means to think about something carefully in your mind. It implies a serious process of mental activity – a careful consideration of all the factors involved. But what does it mean to ponder something in your heart? This is more than a mental activity; it is a response of the whole person. To ponder in our heart is to try to feel it out as well as to think it out. It's a contemplative response. Mary teaches us to ponder the divine mystery, to listen to God's voice deep within us. A wise spiritual director once told me that meditation is leaving the things of the world to concentrate on the things of God but contemplation is leaving the things of God to concentrate on God himself. This is what you are called to do. Nobody can explain its value in the world's terms but its power is immeasurable.

Finally STABAT a word we know from that great Passiontide hymn 'Stabat Mater' often translated 'At the cross her station keeping' which speaks of the sorrows of Mary at the Cross. The word STABAT means standing and speaks of stability, a very important word in the Benedictine life. It suggests living our Christian commitment with courage, coherence and perseverance till the very end. These are essential elements of the religious life which you have already exemplified. In a world and Church which are tossed about by so many pressures, we look to that stability in your communal life together which will be both an example and inspiration in our own spiritual pilgrimage.

So into Mary's Motherly care we commend this sacred venture and with the words of the Aaronic Blessing from our first reading:

May the Lord bless you and keep you

May the Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you

May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.