

Address by Bishop-elect Martin Hayes on his appointment as Bishop of Kilmore

Cathedral of Saint Patrick and Saint Felim, Cavan

- **“The Church of the future is about the increased involvement of lay people; of people and priests working together. My brief, initially, will be to listen, learn and draw upon my recent experience of pastoral planning” – Bishop-elect Hayes**

Good morning and thank you for being here. I welcome, in particular, the people and priests of Kilmore who are tuning in via our webcam.

We are living in strange times as we continue to cope with COVID-19. This is a good day as we begin to gather for the celebration of Mass in our parish churches. I would like to begin by offering my sympathies to the relatives of those who have died recently, including those who suffered with the COVID-19 coronavirus and in particular, those of Kilmore diocese. Also, I would like to acknowledge the service of all the healthcare and all frontline workers who have been and continue to be involved in responding to the pandemic.

It has been a somewhat strange and exciting time for me in the past few weeks as I began to absorb that I was being asked to take on the responsibility of the pastoral care of the diocese of Kilmore. It is a great honour and I am very conscious of the rich tradition of the faith of the people of Kilmore. I am privileged to be chosen by Pope Francis and I feel very humbled. I would like to thank His Excellency, Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, the Papal Nuncio to Ireland, for his presence here this morning, leading us in the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as his kind support and detailed preparations for this announcement. I have kept a journal in recent times and the word ‘unbelievable’ has emerged frequently and I have asked myself many times, “who am I to take on this role of pastoral leadership”? At times, I feel somewhat apprehensive of what is ahead and therefore, I stand here in real need of God’s help and your prayers. I know the Lord has been with me in unexpected ways right throughout my life.

Today, is the Feast day of Saints Peter & Paul and as I reflect upon my journey of faith I can with Saint Paul (writing in his 2nd Letter to Timothy) say with conviction “***The Lord stood by me...***”.

My faith story began in the parish of Moycarkey, Littleton & Two-Mile-Borris near Thurles in the diocese of Cashel & Emly. While, I am from the Borris side - we would be the Hayes’s from Newhill - I was baptised in the Church of St Peter in Moycarkey, received my First Holy Communion there as well as my Confirmation, taking my Confirmation name from the Patron of the Church in Two-Mile-Borris, Saint James. I went to primary school in Littleton and celebrated my First Mass there in the Church of our Lady and Saint Kevin (or Saint Mochoemog of Liathmore). I would like to make the link with my home parish, the roots of my faith upbringing and in so doing give thanks for the faith of my parents, the late Dan Hayes of Newhill and Mary Agnes Hayes (nee Bowe) who came from Grogan, Rathdowney in the diocese of Ossory. I am the eldest of eight, followed by Stella, Mary, Agnes, John, Donal, Michael and Kieran. I am especially conscious today of my late parents Dan and Mary Agnes and my sister Mary who died in infancy and my brother-in-law Donal Buckley. I would also like to remember my Auntie Dakie / Sister Annunciata Hayes PVBM who died just 3 weeks ago. May they rest in peace. It was in Moycarkey, Littleton & Two-Mile-Borris, among family, neighbours and friends that my faith journey began.

My faith journey continued when I found myself in college in Limerick where I encountered the youth faith movement, young people like myself in Muintearas Íosa and priests like Micheal Liston, John O’Shea, Mick Wall as well as the late Bobby Forde RIP of Cloyne. In fact there was a Muintearas Íosa event here in Kilmore, in Miltown parish for the wedding of Martin Kennedy and Breda Brady on 21st July 1984more about that later. I came away from such Muintearas Íosa events convinced that ‘***each one of us is made in the image and likeness of God***’ (Gen. 1:27) yet, I was left searching as to how to apply that to life. Later after some years working in Dublin, it was a case of ‘*I still haven’t found what I was looking for*’ (pre-U2!). In fact, I had a poster at that time which showed a beautiful red setter in full flight jumping off a pier into clear blue water and the caption ran; “*I don’t know where I am going, but I’m going!*”

I was reminded of that image in recent weeks as my research has informed me that Kilmore diocese consisting of parts of Co Meath, Sligo, Fermanagh, much of Co Cavan and North Leitrim, has many beautiful lakes stretching a little east of here and then in the main west onto the Atlantic ocean. I look forward to and am excited at the prospect of getting out and about the diocese of Kilmore.

When reading the publication entitled '**Churches of the diocese of Kilmore**' by Monsignor Liam Kelly, I couldn't help but notice the determination of the people of different parishes who went to great lengths in difficult times to ensure the building and upkeep of their places of prayer and gathering for the Eucharist. Indeed, Bishop Emeritus Leo O'Reilly, in the *Foreword* noted that Liam had the publication dedicated to the faith of the people of Kilmore.

At this point I would like to thank Monsignor Liam, in his role as Diocesan Administrator for his kind welcome extended to me and for his coordination with Father Kevin Fay Adm., of the preparations for today. *Thanks Liam and thanks Kevin.*

I am delighted that Bishop Emeritus Leo O'Reilly is present with us today, a man rooted in the study of the scriptures. I am conscious of his strong and gentle pastoral leadership of Kilmore over 21 years until his retirement on 30 December 2018. *I wish you good health and time to enjoy your retirement. Thanks for your welcome as well as your offer of practical support and your prayers.*

I do have some connections with Kilmore diocese through my time spent in the Irish College in Rome, in particular, as Cardinal Sean Brady was the kindly Rector and Father Gabriel Kelly was a fellow postgraduate student. Also, I have met Father Martin Gilcreest through my work with ACCORD and Sean Coll in preparing for the World Meeting of Families.

I am aware of the time invested in pastoral planning in Kilmore and the efforts to respond in changing times with a mission that can be effective and relevant. The Church of the future is about the increased involvement of lay people; of people and priests working together. My brief, initially, will be to listen, learn and perhaps draw upon my recent experience with others of pastoral planning in Cashel & Emly.

My hope and prayer is that we can work together here in Kilmore with the help of the good Lord to nurture the faith and continue to ensure a place of welcome and hospitality for all. In accord with Pope Francis's image of '*Church as a field hospital*' (interview with Antonio Spadaro, SJ, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 19 August 2013) may we be a refuge of healing and encouragement with space for all who are searching for meaning, especially, as we emerge tentatively from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I look forward, with the help of the Good Lord, to working with you in your parish communities throughout the diocese of Kilmore.

In looking forward, I must look back to acknowledge my native diocese of Cashel & Emly, represented by Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly, and my good friend and classmate Father Jim Purcell. I would like to thank Kieran for his kindness and encouragement always – he was one, in the midst of these COVID-19 times, who broke this life-changing news to me and I thank him for his presence here this morning. I thank his predecessor, Archbishop Dermot Clifford, who ordained me to priesthood; for his entrusting me with responsibilities in ministry and his understanding along the way as I do Dr Thomas Morris who accepted me into the archdiocese of Cashel & Emly and ordained me a Deacon on 4 April 1988. I recall that immediately after my ordination to priesthood on 10 June 1989, as I made my way to give a first blessing to my parents, I met the then Archbishop Emeritus Thomas Morris, at the door of the Cathedral of the Assumption. He put his arm onto my shoulder for support as he went on his knees and then he asked me for a blessing.

In acknowledging my roots in the Archdiocese of Cashel & Emly, I would like to thank all who have been of support and friendship to me; priest colleagues, staff members and students at Saint Patrick's College, Thurles; the people and parishioners of Thurles, in particular, the members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council whom I worked with over the past three years and all the people from the different parishes who participated in our Listening Process in Cashel & Emly. I would like to thank the parish of Saint Michael's, Tipperary

Town, where I have resided for the past three years, in particular, Archdeacon Eugene Everard, Canon Liam McNamara, Father John Beatty, the religious sisters of the Mercy and Presentation congregations and the people of the parish for their welcome and kindness. It has been a privilege to be able to celebrate Eucharist with you, particularly, during these COVID-19 times, *via* local radio and webcam reaching out to people in their homes.

I would like to conclude my words this morning with a short scripture quotation which in fact is the motto of my Ordination Class of 1989, "*Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8). Also, it was central to the first reading at Martin and Breda's wedding in Milltown, on my first visit to Kilmore, 36 years ago. I pray that we may relax in the reality of God's love for each one of us and allow that love to guide us in all our actions.

Thank you for listening and please remember me in your prayers.

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