

26th Sunday (A)

25th September 2014

‘III Extraordinary Synod’

Ezek 18: *What the Lord does is unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust?* Ps 24: Remember Your mercy, Lord. Phil 2: *He emptied Himself... even to accepting death, death on a Cross* Mt 21:28–32: *“think better of it and believe in him”*

This week, our Archbishop, Cardinal Vincent, goes to Rome for nearly three weeks, for an important series of events.

First, he goes to ‘take possession’ of his titular church in Rome. Every Cardinal has a ‘link church’ in the Eternal City of Rome — a church with which their being a Cardinal is associated. Cardinal Cormac’s is the beautiful, vast Dominican church near the Pantheon, *Santa Maria Sopra Minerva*; and Cardinal Vincent’s — where he will celebrate Mass for the first time this week, is the small but lovely Redemptorist church, The Most Holy Redeemer and St Alphonsus, up near Roma Termini station, and not far from the basilica *Santa Maria Maggiore*. One of the loveliest things about Cardinal Nichols’s church is that it houses the famous icon of ‘Our Lady of Perpetual Succour,’ an image famous across the whole Catholic world. Whilst his connection with St Alphonsus church is a titular one, yet it serves as a reminder that as a Cardinal

he has an important duty to assist the Pope — the bishop of Rome — in his guidance of the church, and for that reason each Cardinal has a church assigned to him in Rome. It’s a way of emphasising the closeness of the Cardinals to the Holy Father.

Secondly, and more importantly, Cardinal Vincent goes to attend a two-week-long synod at the Vatican. Every few years, ever since the II Vatican Council, there is a Synod of bishops on a theme of concern to the whole worldwide church. Sometimes these are **general synods**, encompassing the whole worldwide church; others are **special** to certain parts of the world; others still are **‘extraordinary synods,’** made with less preparatory work and fewer participants. It’s the latter type that Cardinal Vincent goes to in Rome from next Sunday till the 19th October. There have only been 2 such ‘extraordinary synods’ previously since the close of the Council in 1965. The title of this extraordinary synod is “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization.” It’s quite a mouthful, but of course

implies that the Church is concerned to build up and support marriage and family life, as this is the crucial place where evangelization takes place. It's in the context of a marriage, where love is committed in the sacrament of God's assistance and grace, that the family can best grow to know and love God, and know and love His commands.

All sorts of pressures in the modern world are arrayed against true marriage and Christian family life. It is the Church's mission to defend and protect family life from mistaken ideas, things which are not in the plan of God for humanity's holiness. Coupled with her teaching, of course, must go loving mercy. This was the attitude of Christ, who taught the Truth strongly, yet also had mercy on sinners, bringing them gently but firmly back to the right ways. As always, the Church's mission is not to re-invent itself; or constantly to dream up new programmes or teachings; nor to 'modernize' itself away from the tradition of Our Lord Himself ... But in fact to return constantly *to* Christ, *to* His divine teaching and example: holding in one hand the Truth of the commandments, and on the other

hand the depth of forgiveness that comes from the divine heart of God.

As Cardinal Vincent said the other day, he goes most of all to *listen* at the Synod, to hear the other bishops and cardinals' interventions; and we ourselves must pray at this time for the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit upon the synod fathers as they pray and discuss with the Pope the best ways of promoting marriage and the family, which is the bedrock of the whole Church.