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Attn: Newsdesks, Photodesks and Religious Affairs Correspondents

Cardinal Brady launches pilgrimage of International Eucharistic Congress Bell in Armagh

Homily of Cardinal Seán Brady, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, at the launch of the pilgrimage of the International Eucharistic Congress Bell in Armagh and anointing of icon of Christ Pantocrator – Evening Prayer in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh – St Patrick's Day 2011

- I am conscious that some commentators have said it is not a good time for Ireland to have a Eucharistic Congress … My hope and prayer this evening is that as the journey to the Eucharistic Congress begins we will have confidence in ourselves and all that is best in our Church and in our country

- I also hope that people from the other Christian Churches will also hear the call of the Bell and join us in remembering the Biblical faith and evangelical zeal of Patrick that we share as sisters and brothers in the one Lord.

- For those who, for whatever reason, have grown distant from the Church and from the practise of their faith in recent years, the visit of the Bell will be an opportunity to rediscover the peace and love that Christ can bring to our lives.

My sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ,

In the reading we have just heard, Saint Paul speaks of having finished a race. Hinting that it hadn't always been easy, he goes on to declare 'I have kept the faith!'

This evening, we come together to mark the beginning of a journey. It is also a journey about faith. It is the beginning of the pilgrim journey of the Eucharistic Congress Bell around all of the Dioceses of Ireland. We are very honoured and proud that the Bell is beginning that journey here in the See of Saint Patrick on this the feast of our National Patron.

Over the next number of days it will travel to other Parishes in the Diocese before moving on to the Diocese of Dromore. From there it will go on to the Diocese of Down and Connor and then onto other dioceses of the country. It will leave Ireland for a short time to go to Lourdes and to be part of the World Youth Day celebrations in Madrid in August.

The Annals of Ulster record a long association between Saint Patrick and sacred bells. The Annals mention in particular the 'Bell of the Testament'. This was said to be one of the treasures buried with Saint Patrick. It is said to have been later willed to Saint Colmcille who gave the Bell to the Church in Armagh. So it is very fitting that the Bell of the Congress should start its journey here in Armagh. The tradition of Patrick also has it that he would leave a small hand bell in every new Church he consecrated as a Bishop.

An example of a lam-chlog of that time can be found today in the National Museum of Ireland. So, in his work of evangelisation, of bringing the joy of the Gospel to the Irish people, the bell had an honoured place in the mission of our National Apostle. It called the people to pray. It invited them to pause from their busy and distracted lives and to turn to what gives life to the spirit and the soul. It beckoned people to meet Jesus himself in his Word and in the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic Congress Bell has a more recent history but its purpose is still the same. Originally from the Dominican Convent School in Portstewart it was used to usher in the new millennium in Glendalough in the Jubilee year 2000. It was used to summon us to what Pope John Paul II called the new evangelisation that is the mission of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium. That call to a new evangelisation will continue to ring out in every parish the bell will visit. It will ring out in memory of Patrick who, in spite of his personal weakness and the many obstacles that came his way, burned with zeal for the hope, life and love that the message of Christ offered to the people of Ireland. The bell will call every one of us to take up that mission from Patrick and make it our own in living out our baptismal call.

These have been turbulent times for the people of Ireland. I am conscious that some commentators have said it is not a good time for Ireland to have a Eucharistic Congress. The wounds from the child abuse scandal in the Church are still too raw, the economic situation of the country is still too difficult. People are too distracted with other important things. All of this is true. Yet, the fact that we have been invited to host the 50th Eucharistic Congress out of all the countries of the world is itself a great vote of confidence in our country. It is a mark of the high esteem we continue to enjoy across the world and the trust others place in our heart, our hospitality and our ability to overcome the obstacles that confront us at this very challenging moment in our history. Others have confidence in us.

My hope and prayer this evening is that as the journey to the Eucharistic Congress begins we will have confidence in ourselves and all that is best in our Church and in our country. The success of the Congress will depend in no small measure on every parish and every parishioner becoming involved in actively supporting the Congress and participating in its preparation and events with confidence and with faith.

I believe the Eucharistic Congress will also play a critical part in the ongoing healing, reparation and renewal called for by Pope Benedict XVI in his Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland published this time last year.

The theme of the Congress is 'The Eucharist: Communion with Christ and with one another.' We need communion with Christ and with one another if healing and renewal is to become possible. We need to rediscover the value of good neighbourliness, of working for others, of being part of and contributing to building vibrant communities. The Eucharistic Congress and the journey of the Congress Bell around the country is an opportunity to do all of these things. They are events for everyone in our society, not just members of the Catholic Church.

That is why I would like to take this opportunity to invite all people of good will to become part of the journey of reflection and renewal of community that is at the heart of the Eucharistic Congress and the visit of the Congress Bell to each of the 26 dioceses in our country.

It is an opportunity to take time to reflect on where we are going as a country and the values that unite us as a people. My hope is that people from the other Christian Churches will also hear the call of the Bell and join us in remembering the Biblical faith and evangelical zeal of Patrick that we share as sisters and brothers in the one Lord.
I also hope that for those who, for whatever reason, have grown distant from the Church and from the practise of their faith in recent years, the visit of the Bell will be an opportunity to rediscover the peace and love that Christ can bring to our lives.

The Congress Bell is not a megaphone shouting for attention above all the other noise of our lives. It is not even a special ring tone designed to stand out from the crowd. It is a simple bell that tolls softly. It invites each one of us to quietly think again about the faith that brought courage, peace and hope to so many generations of Irish people at home and across the world. For those who have forgotten or rejected their faith, it is a gentle call to give faith in Jesus Christ and in His Word another chance.

My hope is that the journey of this bell will bring about a reawakening of faith in each of our parishes. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, my hope is that it will ‘inspire a new springtime of holiness and apostolic zeal for the Church in Ireland.’

AMEN

Further information:
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