

Homily

We have come to give thanks to the Lord for the gift of John Sullivan to his Church as a Model of Holiness. The Saints are those are those who live holiness to such a degree that they truly go beyond human narrowness and live a life of love that embraces everyone. That is the virtuous life that has been recognised by the Church in a special way in the life of John Sullivan. That is the path of life to which each of us is also called.

We rejoice at the recognition of the miracle work though the intercession of John Sullivan; but we are also aware, each of us in our own hearts, of the many graces and favours which have been received through his intercession. Many of you know of that powerful intercession

from personal experience and for that together we give thanks to God.

The miracle is an indication of the fact that the Church recognises John Sullivan as someone close to the Lord and that he can now be presented to the Church as a true intercessor and as a model of holiness for us.

John Sullivan's was a remarkable and rich life marked by a wide variety of experiences and enriched by different traditions of faith and piety as he sought throughout his varied life to become ever closer to the Lord.

The presence of Archbishop Jackson and of some Anglican relatives of John Sullivan here this morning once again reminds us that holiness knows no denominational boundaries. The

holiness of John Sullivan was the fruit of his education in both Catholic and Church of Ireland traditions.

In what particular ways did the holiness of John Sullivan express itself? Reading his biography, he always aware on his responsibility to care for those around him and especially the sick and the poor. He was a man of learning having excelled in his early schooling at Portora Royal School and later in Trinity College and at Lincoln's Inn in London. He was a man of the world, a successful lawyer, well-travelled and open to deep friendship. But there was always within him a deep underlying desire to dedicate himself to more profound holiness. He had gone, for example, to Greece to teach English and he even became a friend of the Greek Prime Minister. But he also spent some time in the one

of the Orthodox Monasteries on Mount Athos, reflecting on a possible call to a monastic life of prayer.

His reflection on holiness led to his reception in to the Catholic Church. He was no stranger to Catholicism. His Mother was Catholic and his Father a devout protestant, but one who in his public position had many contacts with Catholics and with Catholic clergy. John never lost a deep bond with the protestant tradition within he grew up.

On his entry into the Catholic Church John felt even more attracted to finding a more radical path of holiness. Attracted by their life of poverty, he toyed with entering the Capuchin Fathers in Church Street but finally found his way to the Society of Jesus. In taking his first vows as a Jesuit he wished to use the Cross which he had

received from his mother, from whom he had inherited a deep devotion to the Cross, a devotion which became a dominant thread in his piety and personal ascetical life.

The life and struggle and the continuous seeking for holiness of John Sullivan lead us to reflect on the Gospel reading we have heard just now. Jesus is asked a question by an obviously good and talented wealthy young man. The man asks what was needed to inherit eternal life. This was a question that any pious Jew would have asked. Unlike others his question was not to put Jesus to the test. This man would have hoped to receive from a prominent teacher like Jesus some new insights and indications as to how to lead his life with integrity. Jesus answer is not an unexpected one. Jesus simply refers the man to the Law of Moses and he indicates the contents of the commandments.

The man however responds that he has done all these things since childhood. This was not being boastful; it was the humble admission of someone who had obviously tried to keep the commandments but was still seeking a more perfect way. Jesus has no doubt about his sincerity. The Gospel text tells us that Jesus “looked steadily at him and loved him”

But the something happens. Jesus recognises the goodness of this man and in his love for the man Jesus proposes an even more perfect way of following him and finding the path to eternal life. Jesus asks the man to sell all his goods and to follow him. This is precisely the one thing the rich young cannot bring himself to do, and so he went away sad.

John Sullivan faced with the same call placed his life totally at the service of Jesus, renouncing

wealth and worldly ambition and living the simplicity of life as a Jesuit. His life would not just be marked by a rejection of outward wealth, but by a special concern for the poor and especially for the sick and the dying. No circumstance would refrain him from going out to seek to bring health and hope to the sick. His cross became well known - and is indeed well-known still in our time - as a symbol of his concern for the sick and of the healing power of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

In today's world we are all aware of the challenges facing health care. It is a difficult challenge here in Ireland and indeed the world over. Health care is not just about the wonders of modern technology. John Sullivan was a witness to the special care which men and women of faith can bring into the world of sickness and suffering and dying. He was not a man of

technology; his Cross was his sole instrument of mercy and healing.

John Sullivan's faith was the product of two traditions and always remained so and was enriched by that fact. The recognition of his saintliness offers an opportunity for all Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike, to celebrate through witnessing to our common baptism through a renewed call to bring the message of the healing power of the Cross of Jesus to those who are sick and troubled, lonesome and abandoned and to the many who seek meaning and purpose in a world which can often feel so empty and alone