

“Open Your Hearts in Prayer” – Papal Nuncio Challenge to Young People at Invocation 2011

Archbishop Antonio Mennini, Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain was the principal celebrant and preacher at the concluding Mass of the three-day Invocation 2011 Vocations Discernment Conference, held at St Mary’s College, Oscott, Birmingham, on Trinity Sunday, 19 June.

The concelebrants included: The Most Revd Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, the Rt Revd Peter Doyle, Bishop of Northampton, the Rt Revd Bishop David McGough, auxiliary bishop of Birmingham, Mgr Mark Crisp, Rector of Oscott College, Abbot Christopher Jamison, OSB, former Abbot of Worth and Director of the National Office for Vocation, Fr Paul Moss, Vocations Director, Archdiocese of Birmingham, Fr Stephen Langridge, Vocations Director, Archdiocese of Southwark, Fr. Angel Ochagavia from the Claretian Missionaries, together with event speakers and members of the seminary staff at Oscott College.

The Nuncio wore the magnificent gold vestments and the Pectoral Cross used by Bishop William Bernard Ullathorne, OSB, the first Bishop of Birmingham, September 1850 until he resigned in February 1888.

The chalice used during the Mass was a gift from Pope Benedict XVI to the Archdiocese of Birmingham, during his visit on Sunday 19 September 2010, when he beatified Blessed John Henry Newman, at Cofton Park, Birmingham.

Archbishop Mennini, preaching in the chapel where Blessed John Henry Newman preached his famous The Second Spring Sermon on 13 July 1852, said: “When we are young our whole lives lie before us. There are so many possibilities and hopes. Our choices and actions will determine what sort of person we become. As we reflect on our lives we discover an inner yearning that we cannot satisfy by ourselves. It is a longing that requires communion with another person and ultimately - because this is how we have been made – with God.”

Addressing the participants at the second, three-day, national Invocation Festival, aimed at young men and women, aged 16-35, who are looking to deepen their relationship with Christ and in understanding God’s will for their lives, the Nuncio said: “Never forget too, that when God calls us by name and asks us to follow him, he offers us true freedom. God asks us, in the face of all that seems wrong in our world, to be positive, to build up his Kingdom and to change the world for the better. There is no place for pessimism here, for his call to each one of us is, in fact, liberation.”

Archbishop Mennini, on his first visit to the Archdiocese of Birmingham, said: “Blessed John Paul II referred to your generation as the “heralds of the new millennium” and he constantly invited you to be apostles to your friends, showing them the path to true happiness. The Christian faith is marked with an irrepressible hope. A significant part of that hope is expressed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So do not be afraid to tell your friends about this lovely Sacrament and how it has affected you.”

He emphasised: “To discern God’s call we need to withdraw from external activity and to dedicate time to prayer. At the last World Youth Day Pope Benedict reminded us that: Jesus is always present in our hearts, quietly waiting for us to be still with him, to hear his voice, to abide in his love. Be

convinced that the Lord is waiting for you to open your hearts to him in prayer. He wants to meet you personally and to enter into a dialogue with you. This conviction will fill you with an urgent desire to seek periods of silence in your daily life where you have the space to be drawn into union with God in prayer.

“In this regard I should like to commend to you the practice of Eucharistic Adoration which you have experienced during this weekend of discernment. Adoration draws us away from external distractions into a growing communion with Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. Encourage your friends to join in this practice.”



Archbishop Antonio Mennini concluded his inspiring and thought-provoking sermon by saying: “Be prepared for the fact that your growing friendship with Christ in prayer will lead to discipleship. This discipleship will need to be expressed in concrete actions that show your love for God and your desire to serve him in others. You are called to change the world, to build a culture of life, a culture forged by love and respect for the nature of man. Jesus has a specific vocation mind for each one of you... When you feel in your heart the call to respond to a particular vocation do not be afraid.”

Before the final blessing, Fr Stephen Langridge read the text of a special Apostolic Blessing from Pope Benedict XVI.

About 670 participants from parishes throughout England and Wales registered for the Invocation 2011 Vocations Discernment Conference according to Mr Chris Smith, Vocations Promotions and Publicity Officer for the Archdiocese of Birmingham and a mastermind behind Invocation 2010 and 2011.

The event held in a large marquee in the College grounds provided fellowship, catechesis, confession and adoration together with time for prayer, quiet reflection, and discernment through keynote speakers, interactive workshops and above all the opportunity to encounter the Lord.

Peter Jennings