

New nuncio conveys Pope's love for Irish Catholics



Pope Benedict XVI understands the struggles of the Irish Church and holds it in special esteem, new apostolic nuncio Archbishop Charles J. Brown said as he celebrated Mass in Dublin on Feb. 19.

“I have worked for many years very closely with the Holy Father and I can tell you from my personal experience that he has always had, and he continues to have, a great love for the people of Ireland and a high regard for the Catholic Church in Ireland,” the Pope's representative said at his formal welcome.

Archbishop Brown, who worked in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with then-Cardinal Ratzinger, said the Pope “knows as well that these recent years have been difficult for Catholic believers in Ireland.”

The nuncio spoke from his experience, saying the Pope was “scandalized and dismayed as he learned about the tragedy of abuse perpetrated by some members of the clergy and of religious congregations. He felt deeply the wounds of those who had been harmed and who so often had not been listened to.”

“From the beginning,” the archbishop recalled, “Pope Benedict was resolute and determined to put into place changes which would give the Church the ability to deal more effectively with those who abuse trust, as well as to provide the necessary assistance to those who had been victimized.”

“Pope Benedict has been relentless and consistent on this front, and I assure you that he will continue to be.”

Civil and ecumenical representatives, as well as clergy, religious, and members of lay Catholic groups all attended the nuncio's Mass at St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral. It was the archbishop's first liturgy since his Feb. 16 meeting with President Michael D. Higgins, who received his papal letter of appointment.

Dublin's Archbishop Diarmuid Martin introduced the New York-born nuncio at Monday's ceremony. He stressed the papal representative's mission “to foster deeper communion in the life of the Church, and to foster communion, harmony and peace in the human family that is so often fragmented.”

Archbishop Brown's late 2011 appointment came at the end of a difficult year for Irish Catholics, as sex abuse investigations prompted public attacks from Prime Minister Enda Kenny. On Nov. 3, the Irish government closed its embassy at the Vatican, purportedly for financial reasons.

The nuncio, who was appointed Nov. 26 and ordained on Epiphany of 2012, spoke about his own Irish Catholic heritage in the homily at his welcome Mass on Sunday.

“I am the descendant of men and women of Ireland, who emigrated from this island, possessing little more than the treasure of their Catholic faith, which they, through the generations, have passed on to me,” he declared. “Were it not for the faith of Ireland, I would not be a Catholic today.”

The words of his homily, inspired by Jesus' healing of a paralyzed man, indicated his sensitivity to the Irish Church's recent trials.

“The Church herself is wounded by the sins of her members,” he observed.

“And just as sin produces a kind of spiritual paralysis in the individual, a radical lack of the spiritual energy which is grace, so too there can be a kind of spiritual paralysis in sections of the Church, where that energy seems to have disappeared, enthusiasm is dissipated, liturgical life grows cold.”

To heal the Church, he said, “we need to do exactly what an individual does – come again into the presence of the Lord, of Christ himself, so that he can heal and restore us to life.”

“His presence is experienced in many ways, but most powerfully in his word and in his sacraments – above all, in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.”

Dublin will host the Church's 50th International Eucharistic Congress from June 10-17, 2012. Archbishop Brown said it was a “great joy” to begin his work during the run-up to the congress, which aims to renew faith in Jesus' Eucharistic presence as “the absolute center of Catholic life.”

“Something new is indeed happening,” the nuncio reflected. “I am convinced that the Lord is preparing something beautiful for his Church.”

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