

RENEWAL OF VOWS 2024

In the final keynote address at the recently held National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Bishop Robert Barron urged the participants to leave the stadium emboldened by “*the light of Christ*” and to change society. 70,000 laity, 1,100 priests, 1,200 religious and 200 bishops took part in this extraordinary event. As one commentator reflected, who could not have been amazed by the beauty and richness of the different vocations in the Church faced with living examples, above all examples of people happy in their vocation. Bishop Barron took this thought up when he quoted St. Catherine of Siena’s words: “*Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.*”

Brethren, I cannot think of any better words to encourage us on this day when we renew our vows: “*Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.*” God manifests to us who we are, how we are created to embrace life to the full — he has given to us the Gospel and everything else is a footnote. Yet one of the most notable features of our world today is the culture of self-invention: ‘I decide who I am, I decide me and my worth, I decide what it’s all about — even my gender - I’ll decide who is the greatest. Because that is my human right! Right? Wrong.

St Benedict lived in equally puzzling times and gives to us the medicine for our confusion, isolation and insecurity. The medication is obedience, *conversatio morum*, and stability. Here in our monastic vows are the way to restore the image and likeness that were inscribed within us but that were ruptured in the fall. When the voice of the media and the world around is chasing after wealth, pleasure, power and honour, self-invention, our vows help us to “live in Christ” and live for Christ and live from Christ. The vows open us to listen to and for His will rather than insist on my opinions. They invite us to conform our way of living, our priorities to His example, to feed on His truth that sets us free. And we are encouraged to remain rooted in the truth despite of all the voices around us and within.

Bishop Barron turned to his audience and said, if beginning today 70 million Catholic all began to live according to the Gospel truth, society would change instantly. What if, brethren, what if you and I seriously decided to live our vows wholeheartedly and with integrity, not that I am suggesting for one moment that we don’t, but what if we as a monastic community were more evidently intentional in our Benedictine life and witness, we could, we would evangelise simply by our daily life. We would be an agent of change for our society by giving a clear sense of direction. We would give new energy to our Catholic Church in England and Wales. We did in former times, we can today.

The document *Strating Afresh from Christ*, puts this so well: “*In imitation of Jesus, those whom God calls to follow him are consecrated and invited to continue his mission in the world. Indeed, consecrated life itself, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes a mission. The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in history for the salvation of all.*”

All we need to do is to take the advice of St Catherine of Siena: “*Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.*”

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

Mass during Conventual Chapter, 13 August 2024