**Mass of Thanksgiving at Stone, 14 July 2023**

The pattern of the Master is the pattern of the disciple.

And the pattern of the Master is one of death and resurrection.

In our individual lives as religious, as sisters and brothers within the different branches of the Dominican Family, we are used to this pattern of death and resurrection as an integral part of our lives. We move from one place to another every few years, or at least are ready to do as need arises. We move from one position of responsibility or teaching or pastoral role as need arises. This is something we are very used to, something we accepted when we were clothed and made profession. It is not something that is always easy, but at the same time it creates a certain freedom within us – as we die to one place or one undertaking and live to another place and undertaking.

And this pattern of death and resurrection, which we experience in our individual lives, is also sometimes, as today, extended to the projects and institutions of our religious congregations themselves. In all the branches of our Dominican family we have had to give up many things in the decades that have passed, as our own numbers have changed and the demands of our missions have altered.

If it were death only that we experienced, then it would be hard. Just as if the pattern of Christ’s time on earth ended in death only, it would be hard. Of course, death in itself can be a very positive and worthwhile thing – the completion of a life well and fully lived, or the life-giving sacrifice of ourselves to defend or save others.

But death, in itself and by itself, remains a hard thing. Perhaps the hardest thing for most of us to come to terms with. And we should not ever make light of how hard the death of this convent here in Stone is for so many people.

And, ye,t the pattern of the Master which we share in is not that of death only, but of death and resurrection. Death gives way to life and indeed the death of Christ was a step towards the new and wonderous life of his resurrection, as it swallowed up and transformed the seeming defeat of death into the victory of his rising again to life.

And it is the same for us. It is the same for the sisters of the congregation of St Catherine of Siena. We have seen that new life in recent years begin and then mature and flourish, as new members with new interests and talents have joined the congregation, and the work in other places has expanded and deepened. This has been a wonderful thing to behold, a source of blessing not just for the sisters themselves, but to all of us who have had the opportunity to share in it.

The pattern of the Master is reflected in the pattern of the disciple. But this is more than a reflection. Rather the journey from death to resurrection in the disciple is always animated by what the Master has done and brought about by the presence of the Master through his Spirit and his grace. As Christ says to the disciples in the Gospel for this Mass:

And Jesus said to them, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Christ was with the sisters who first came here to Stone and then in the generations that followed as they did dedicate themselves, heart, mind and soul, to compassionate care for the sick and aged and to educating children for a full and fruitful life, as the opening collect for this Mass states. Christ was with them, giving them the strength to undertake this new work and experience this new life here in Stone. And now, Christ is with the sisters as they find the strength and find the vision to explore new forms of work, especially in the area of the academic apostolate. And, as we give thanks today for the century and a half of their work here in Stone, so we pray that the words of Christ may encourage them for the next century and a half elsewhere –‘behold I am with you always, to the close of the age.’

The pattern of the Master is, however, also not just that of his death and resurrection. Because there is also the life of Christ lived out among us. And all the words, all the actions, of Christ during that lifetime among us remain valid for us in every age – a source of inspiration and instruction, a treasury to draw on as we seek to live in the present at any time and in any place.

And we see this pattern also in the realities of our religious congregations. Each of our congregations is a living tradition, in which the past is never simply past, but always a part of the present for us. The memory of what has happened in the course of the whole history of our congregations, the example of what people did in the past, the teaching they have left behind, forms a treasury from which we draw inspiration and instruction, as we move on to the new projects and challenges of the present. In a living tradition, the past, the tradition, is always part of the living, of the present.

So, as we give thanks for the work of the sisters here in Stone today, and as we experience a measure of sadness that the life of this convent has come to an end, this should not be confused with a forgetting of everything that took place here. For the memory of it all continues in the life of the congregation of St Catherine of Siena, as its life and work continue, now and in the years to come.

The living tradition of the congregation of St Catherine of Siena is one moment, in fact, in the whole work of Christ, manifest in the life and work of the sisters, as it continues in the world until the close of the age. As the reading from the letter to the Ephesians puts it:

With all wisdom and insight, he had made known to us the mystery of his will, according to the his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

‘to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’- the work of Christ gathering all things together through the work of the Church is the living tradition that underpins all the other living traditions we find in the Church, which share in and further the work of Christ.

So, today, let us give thanks for the work of the sisters here in this convent, give thanks for the treasury of memory, of example, that this work has given to the congregation as a whole, and give thanks for the continuing work of the sisters as they still dedicate themselves in heart, mind and soul to compassionate care and to education as their tradition renews and extends itself in the years to come.

May Christ Our Master be with them always to the end of the age, and may our holy father, Dominic and our sister, Holy Catherine continue to care and pray for them.