

## IPSHA CONFERENCE, COMMENCEMENT SERVICE

SUNDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2010

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life. Amen

I wonder what brought you here, or perhaps, what led you here... which first raises the question of how you managed to extract yourselves from Father's Day festivities in your household.

Had you already left before the burnt toast was cooked and served? Have you been travelling all day?

I know some of you will have only started packing and preparing yesterday, while others here have been very focussed on this event for much of this year.

Was it a rush to get here? Did you drive or fly? How much organising has it taken to get here? When did you know you were coming?

And what about the wider question of what got you here.

What got you into education in the first place?

Did you imagine, when you were younger or starting out, that you would ever find yourself at an Independent Primary Schools Heads Association conference on a chilly Father's Day in 2010?

How did that journey begin? What led you into education?

Was it a love of children?

Were you stirred and captivated by the innocence and purity of our society's youngest members? Were you playful yourself? Were you wanting to protect some of society's weakest? Or did you want a job that would enable you to laugh as well as cry; to celebrate, as well as endure moments of frustration?

Was it the children that drew you into teaching?

Or was it the teaching itself?

Did you have something to say? Did you want to contribute to the present and the future in a meaningful way? Did you have a firm belief in the honour, value and dignity of the teaching profession? Were you inspired by one (or more) who taught you?

Or did you have a commitment to life long learning, knowing that, anyone who sets out to teach, from their pupils will be taught?

Or was it your faith that led you here?

Did you choose to spend your days devoted to the formation and education of our community's young on account of what you had heard and learned from one of history's most impressive teachers?

Did you move into this vocation in response to the teachings and actions of Jesus? The one who said, "Let the children come to me, for it is to such as these that all of the richness of God belongs."

Watch the children. Learn from the children. BE LIKE the children, Jesus said, for they have much to teach us.

But I'm not telling you anything new there, am I?

Each of us has been humbled by the words or deeds of one of our young ones, sometimes when WE most needed them, and often, while we were in the process of giving to - or teaching - *them*.

It's a two way exchange, this teaching.

As is the task of leadership, to which you (indeed we) have been called.

Moving into positions where we have responsibility for varied individuals and groups, requires of us great focus and even greater courage - for we are required to be more than popular. We are required to lead with conscience.

And how timely is this calling, in light of our recent election 'non-result.'

When leaders choose to seek popularity, rather than acting decisively and with conscience, results will be murky, to say the least.

I mention the person of Jesus here again, for he was nothing if not decisive. Confusing? Sometimes. Demanding? Often, but always decisive and disarmingly clear.

'Let the children come.' He said.

'Love your enemies.'

'Pray for the ones who trouble you most.' That was the message in the reading we heard earlier. Pray for those who drive you mad, who persecute you, who wear you out.

Pray for them and know that no burden is yours alone.

In other words - relax a little and lighten your load.

Remember and give thanks for all that has led you here, and that has fed you along your way. Know that you are feeding others, when you lead with conscience; and go forth in peace, that the children may inherit all that awaits them and that we too may be blessed as we serve them.

In the name of Christ, we pray this, AMEN