

MICHAEL DRUMM

INTRODUCTION: It gives me great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Father Michael Drumm, a lecturer in Theology at Maitre De Institute in Dublin and a friend of both IHCPT and HCPT, he has done work for both of us in recent years and is getting to know the organisation well. So a big welcome to Father Michael Drumm.

(APPLAUSE)

So good evening to you all. You are very strong people to be still here after about 10 talks.

(LAUGHTER)

I presumed that most of you would have skited off at this stage, so it's very impressive that you're still here. Sometimes we talk about the period when the talk immediately after lunch that Nicholas had today as the graveyard session. If that was the graveyard, then this must be something like pure purgatory.

(LAUGHTER)

Or maybe ... I was just thinking, maybe it's limbo, there's a theological difficulty in the definition of limbo. But I've now come up with one. It's what happens to human consciousness after you've listened to about 8 talks.

(LAUGHTER)

So if anyone does fall asleep, let them be. Sleep is one of the most important and spiritually significant realities that we do experience. We'll be talking to you ... there's going to be a difference in tone now from what we heard earlier in the day because I'm going to talk about pilgrimage rather than the able bodied or the disabled but you will find a lot of echo in what I have to say in terms of what we heard earlier in the day, though it won't be directly linked immediately, as you'll see.

I'm going to talk about pilgrimage. One pilgrimage comes to mind immediately. I'm from the North West of Ireland, near Donegal, a place called Sligo and one of the most famous medieval pilgrimages that still exists anywhere in the world is Loch Durg in County Donegal. Have any of you been to Loch Durg? There are still some stupid people in the world.

(LAUGHTER)

Psychiatrists and counsellors have a good future.

(LAUGHTER)

Loch Durg is notably probably the harshest penitential pilgrimage in the world, not just certainly in Europe, probably in the world and there's a terrible problem with people falling asleep because it lasts 3 days and for one night you're out of bed and then there's this extraordinary Mass at 6 o'clock in the morning which is populated on the one hand by a crowd of people who've just got out of bed after the best sleep of their lives because they were up for 48 hours and then they got to bed and they snored happily. It's the best sleep you could ever have. And the other crowd who are standing literally amongst them have been up all night and are literally like sacks of potatoes toppling over and there's a terrible problem because, on the one hand the crowd of people are awake and are interspersed with the crowd that are literally dosing off at either side of them. And of old, Loch Durg, was a famous canon, later Monsignor Ward, who used to go round the church poking people telling them to wake up.

(LAUGHTER)

And on one famous occasion, he was walking by a fellow conked out, sound asleep during a homily or something and he roared down to a young fellow sitting beside him, he said, young man, wake that man up, that old man beside you. And the young fellow shouted back up at him and he said, wake him up yourself, you put him to sleep.

(LAUGHTER)

So if anyone does fall asleep, I'm not going to wake them up and you should leave them alone as well.

Now, what we're going to talk a little bit about is pilgrimage and it's a very interesting area because not least from an academic point of view and study in colleges and so on, it's the kind of thing that was ignored for centuries and centuries in the sense of academic study of it. I mean, no one really studied pilgrimage. People went on pilgrimage but no one really studied it that closely. About 10 years ago, for various reasons, I was asked to begin to study it, not least because where I come from is beside 2 very major pilgrimage centres. One is Knock, the Marion Shrine in County Mayo and the other, Loch Durg in Donegal, the one I just mentioned. And when I was a youngster growing up, we went on endless pilgrimages to other places like Holy Wells, Mass Rocks, islands, mountains round about. To understand by the way an important story reflection on Knock, Knock is the Irish Marion Shrine. Obviously Lourdes is the main French Marion Shrine and the most important European one. To understand the significance, the import of this point, you have to understand that Knock is in County Mayo, for those who don't know there, and Mayo is the back end of nowhere.

(LAUGHTER)

The only place where Mary ever appeared where she said nothing.

(LAUGHTER)

Was in Knock.

(LAUGHTER)

And there's always been this question, what happened to her when she appeared in Knock?

(LAUGHTER)

And there's been a lot of reflection on this but I've come up with one notable answer, after a long series of research and reflection, and that is that when she saw Mayo, she was speechless.

(LAUGHTER)

There hasn't been that much written about pilgrimage. The most important writer of all concerning it given that there's a lot of Scots people here, it's important to acknowledge this, is a very important Scottish Catholic called Victor Turner, who was a very important cultural anthropologist, he died about 20 years ago and Turner more than anybody else led the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century reflection on the meaning of pilgrimage and insofar as what I'm going to say to you now is indebted to anybody, it's indebted to him but you can blame me for any of the errors or stupidity that might emerge in what we're going to reflect on as regards pilgrimage. Of course, another reason why there hasn't been that much written from a theological point of view apart from other sciences is because there's a deep suspicion about pilgrimage. There's a massive suspicion about visionaries and quite correctly so. I mean, the world is full of whacko visionaries, people who have seen this, that and the other that's complete rubbish. And there's people who have drawn conclusions about what they've seen that have led others deeply astray or certainly arguably so and not least the clergy and church leadership has always had a question mark about the nature of visionaries. Virtually all visionaries, though not recent ones maybe to the same extent, historically visionaries tend to be lay people, which is a very interesting thing. One of the few ways that lay people have a significant voice in the church was actually through visions and commonly the clergy objected to what was seen. There's a very recent book actually only this week, there's a very controversial but notable book published on the apparition in Knock ... we're getting over the speechless bit now ... but actually we're coming back to that because there's now an argument that some of the original visionaries did hear something in Knock but what they heard was criticism of the local parish priest.

(LAUGHTER)

And that when the final investigation was complete, Mary had become speechless.

(LAUGHTER)

Rather than that she had started out on that path. At any rate, the point is more serious than that. The point is that there's all sorts of question marks about visionaries and therefore there's all sorts of question marks about who controls the vision, who controls how the pilgrimage is going to develop in the future and so on. So that's some of the background. Let's move along then into some of the theory about pilgrimage.

Really, everything I'm going to say only revolves around 3 points and they don't sound very deep but actually they are interesting. One is, why not stay at home. The second is, you can't go on pilgrimage to your kitchen and the third one is pilgrims, go home.

(LAUGHTER)

So it's about that deep now.

(LAUGHTER)

The first one is, why not stay at home? Which is a very interesting question by the way. It's like a question people ask, do you ever go to these sort of gatherings and someone asks the very deep question at the end, what will we do now? It endlessly happens at clerical gatherings, you know. What will we do now? Well, for crying out loud, you'd think you'd go home would be the first thing.

(LAUGHTER)

Because you're hardly going to stay here unless you're going to buy the hotel or something, so you're going to go home anyway. So an awful lot of these questions

lead to very obvious questions but that one will come up later. The more immediate question is, why not stay at home in the first place. The reason is of course ... well, there's various reasons ... is that journeying is hugely important. Journey ... forget about pilgrimage for one moment ... going on a journey is the most important metaphor we have in all religions for the deeper meaning of religious life. Take the bible just even for a couple of moments. Think of the old man Abraham, the old man ... if he had just ... if Abraham had quietly retired and snoozed off and took an easy life and hadn't led such an active retirement as he did, then the whole history of religions would have been different from what actually occurred. Think of Jonah who wanted to go to anywhere but Nineveh. Think of the magi looking for Bethlehem. Think of the shepherds coming from the hills around Bethlehem down to where Jesus was born. Think of the poor fellow who went on the walk down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among brigands and the only decent person he met was a Samaritan. Think of the disciples walking on the road to Omiss. Think of Mary Magdala walking to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. Think this year in particular of St Paul on the road to Damascus. Think of Paul wandering over the whole of the Roman Empire proclaiming that Jesus was somehow the saviour of the world. From a religious point of view, journey is very significant. If you want to live a safe life, it would be better to stay at home. And that's not just true of major journeys like those recorded in big religious literature. Think of going for a drive or a walk. As you walk down the straight road, you can see straight ahead of you but any time you come to a turn either walking or driving, you really have no idea what's around the corner. Sometimes you'll end up in a dead end and you literally have to retrace your steps. Sometimes most critically of all, you come to a fork in the road and you have to go one way or the other and the really interesting thing about a fork in the road is once you go one way, you can't go the other or at least you'd have to come back and go that way. You can't travel both ways at once and of course in the world we live in and indeed particularly in France for donkeys years, they have roundabouts. You arrive in a roundabout and there's several possible exits. Now, you could spend your life going around the roundabout for good but at some point you must decide where to exit. If it's true of walking and driving, it's even more true of the journey of life. Sometimes life is straight and easy, sometimes you go around a corner and you hit something that you could never even have dreamed of. Sometimes in life for certain, we have to retrace our steps. We end up in dead ends that there's no point

in continuing on and we literally have to go back to somewhere from where we started. And sometimes in life we definitely hit a fork in the road, there are 2 possible ways to go, if you go one way, you cannot go the other and it doesn't mean that one way is true and the other is false, they could both be equally valuable but to go one way means you cannot go the other. Going on a journey then is an important metaphor of what religion is all about. Dag Hammarskjold, the great First Secretary General at the United Nations, not least as a reflector in Christian living, said that the longest journey is the journey inwards to yourself. There's all these outer journeys but there's also the journey deeper and deeper into ourselves. It seems legitimate to claim, I would think, that on that journey inwards, that pilgrimage, going on pilgrimage to particular places can be of benefit, that it can actually help us on the inner journey, these pilgrimage journeys that we undertake.

Remember I said earlier, you cannot go on pilgrimage to your kitchen and as silly a point as it is, it's actually important. You cannot go on pilgrimage to your home. You must leave your home to go on pilgrimage and historically people have gone to what we would call threshold places, special places that stand out. In the history of religion, the outstanding threshold places are places like mountains, the mountain top was always a draw; islands, not least uninhabited islands; forests, not least the clearing in the middle of the forest somewhere; deserts; and indeed big shrines like the one that we're in here in Lourdes. And the word I want to get you to reflect a little bit upon now is the word threshold. It's not a word we normally use in everyday English. The threshold, the marginal place, the word from Latin is liminal, the liminal place and I want to point out threshold to you now. It's awful simple. This is just ... follow with me for a moment ... I'm going for a walk because we're talking about journeying ... and I'm heading off to a threshold in this room. In every room in the world, including every room in your house, there's a threshold. I'm headed on my way to it over here. Here it is. The threshold is the place under the door. Look over this way. Here I am at the threshold. It could be any door now but I'm at this threshold. The threshold is the place you run to if there's an earthquake by the way. So this is the threshold here. Notice the threshold. It's a very important place and there's one in every single room in the world. In that very boring room, you can look left, right, up, down but that's about it. You couldn't be too sure what's happening

outside the windows, not least now as it begins to get dark. Can you hear me at the far end of the room?

SHOUT FROM AUDIENCE – YES.

Well done, you. Well, you wouldn't believe what's going on out here. Oh my God.

(LAUGHTER)

Would you stop that.

(LAUGHTER)

It's not true. Go away. The Bishop did not say that.

(LAUGHTER)

I can see out here into a world that you can only guess about. I'm at the threshold. At the very minimum, I can see two rooms but for all you know, I can see a vast distance outside of here. The threshold is an interesting place because you're not caught up in the small boring room that you're caught in. At a very minimum, you can see outside here and of course potentially you can see far further afield and that's why people have always gone to mountain tops. Have you ever wondered what is the attraction of the mountain top, even if it's a low hill? And of course the attraction of the mountain top is that once you go up it, the minimum you can see is that there is something behind the mountain. The most mysterious mountain in the world is not the mountain you can see. It's the fact that there's a mountain behind the mountain and potentially there's something further behind that again and who knows what's in the valley behind that. Where I grew up, it's all hills and valleys and you went up and we were brought up by our parents obviously different people as we were young children and the first time you got up the first hill was a big mystery and that was great and then you wanted to get up behind the mountain behind the mountain and you went up there. Now, when we went up there, by the way, finally,

and discovered that what was behind the mountain behind the mountain was Mayo, we said, ah well, there's not that much more to things.

(LAUGHTER)

Threshold places are hugely important and it is interesting that pilgrimage centres are almost invariably threshold places. Wouldn't you think that Mary rather scuriously would have some sense and appear in the city of London or in downtown Manhattan? I mean, who would pick this sort of a joint down in the Pyrenees in the South of France? Who on earth would pick Knock? And similarly with so many other possible places. It's interesting that pilgrimage and it's not just Marion pilgrimages. Pilgrimage in general will always bring you to a place that's rather marginal. Now, I want you to keep the word marginal in mind because it's come up an awful lot today. There's all sorts of personal marginality. There's the marginalisation of people that we've heard so much very interesting reflection on all day today and so many very different rich perspectives on it. But there's also the geographic margin. There's literally places that are off a bit on the edge, a bit out on the edge of things and they've always been attractive to people to go to the margin, to go to the edge because when you're on the edge, you see things differently than you do from the centre. Home ... literally the word home, think of it for a moment, think of your home wherever it is in Britain or Ireland or wherever you're from ... home is the centre of your world and I mean literally so and so it should be. It doesn't matter where it is. It doesn't matter if you move home. You could move from one home to another. You could even move from one country to another. But wherever your home is, is the centre of your world and it should be. It's where you live, where you sleep, where you work, I mean, you might go out to work, you understand the point, but it's around your home somewhere. It's where you earn the money by which you will live, where you get the bread to eat, it's where you rear your children if you have children, it's where everything that really matters takes place. Home is the centre of the world. Home is by far the most important place. It's a million times more important than any pilgrimage centre. But if you only ever stayed at home, you're in danger of living in the valley and the plain and never realising that there's a mountain behind a mountain, that there's other valleys that you haven't seen yet. And therefore people in all religions, in all traditions, have taken

themselves on pilgrimage, they've gone on journey to places of threshold and they've gone there you could argue of course that it's largely a waste of time but of course it's not and therefore it's worth reflecting on what happens in the pilgrimage place. Why is it that the pilgrimage place is attractive and what is it that happens in the pilgrimage place that doesn't happen at home, because that's really the interesting question.

The first thing I think to say is the attraction of the pilgrimage place is that nobody is at home. That's why, by the way, if you lived like in Lourdes or Knock if that was your place of work, your home, then it cannot be a place of pilgrimage for you. The place of pilgrimage for you is somewhere else but that's not true of 99% of us who are here today. We are people who will be on pilgrimage to Lourdes as such, given that that's the example that we're following here. Because nobody is at home, everybody is a little bit off centre. At home is the safest place. You know how to turn on the tele, you know where the fridge is, you know where everything is, you can walk round in the dark and not fall over everything. Home is an easy place cos we know it so well. But the strange place is important as well and nobody is at home in the pilgrimage centre and therefore I think it's true to say people begin to talk and particularly to listen to each other in a way that doesn't happen at home. They talk and listen to each other in a way that doesn't happen in the pub or the shop or the queue for something at the bus stop maybe or anywhere else at home. People interact with each other in a different way in the pilgrimage centre and they particularly interact differently with strangers. The main work I've done on this is not to do with Marion shrines like Lourdes or Knock. It has to do with the very harsh penitential pilgrimage that I mentioned to you earlier in Loch Durg in County Donegal in Ireland and one of the reasons this is most interesting is precisely because it's so penitential and I've spoken to people. I've basically used people who have gone there as guinea pigs and I haven't told them and I've spoken to them before they went and I kind of said to them, why are you going and they all say, oh I'm going because I have to do something because, you know, myself, I'm such a sinner, I feel I should do penance. I'm going because other people have gone and classically people say I'm going because my friends have cajoled me into going. More interestingly then you de-briefed them when they come back and when you come back you say to them, OK, how was it, knowing well what the first reaction's going to

be. So you say, how was it? The experience by the way is absolutely terrible. So you say to them, how was it? And the first thing they all say is, oh my God, I'm not going back to that place in a thousand years. Sweet Lord God, who talked me into going to it? And I say, well who did talk you into it? Oh, that so and so who's a so called friend of mine. It's the last time that I'll ever go anywhere with them. So they all ... you always get this immediate hostility because the thing is demanding, it's very demanding physically more than emotionally. It's physically terribly demanding. You meet the same people about 3 or 4 months later when they've calmed down and got over it and so on and you say to them, will you ever go back to Loch Durg again and they say ... naturally you expect the answer should be no, no way. The answer is never, almost never no. The answer is almost always ... well, I'll think about it, you know, I probably won't, it's too demanding, I don't know what that pilgrimage thing is about anyway but I might go back and invariably a whole lot of them do go back and of course the experience physically will be similar to the experience that you have here every Easter time because your experience also would be physically a very demanding pilgrimage because that's one of the most interesting things about pilgrimage.

Pilgrims are not tourists. A pilgrimage, you've probably noted, not least in Lourdes, is terribly exhausting. It is not at all a time for reflection. I think there could be no greater contradiction of the meaning of true pilgrimage. A retreat is the time for reflection. Imagine trying to reflect deeply, and Loch Durg is a good example of it, where people attempt ... if they sit down and they begin to say, OK let me try and do a bit of Buddhist meditation, the next thing is you hear them snoring. They just conk out straight on the ground because you couldn't go to it without sleep. Similarly, could you imagine when you'd be so tired here during your pilgrimage at Easter time, if you sat down and began to do very private prayer, the first thing you'd do is snore because, again, pilgrimage is exhausting, it is terribly physically demanding.

Noticing that, the extraordinary contrast with tourism. Tourism is all about rest. By the way, there's an important point, as simple as it is. In your life and mine, not least because the biggest growth industry in the world is tourism, we are at times, that's you and me, each one of us, let's just put it in the first person singular. I am at times a tourist and I am at times a pilgrim. It doesn't mean we're different people, it can be the same person. But when I'm a tourist, I want to, as we say nowadays, chill out, I

want to sleep probably ad nauseum, I want to just wander round and take things real easy. But when you're on a pilgrimage, you must go with the flow, you must get up in the morning, no matter what time you went to bed at night, even if you're in a half state of sleepiness when you get up and even if you walk around half exhausted for the next day because the meaning of the pilgrimage doesn't flow from rest. The meaning of the pilgrimage flows from going with everything that's happening, going through the rituals, even if you don't believe them all, even if you can't bring yourself to a personal full acceptance of them. You have to do everything a pilgrim would do, you have to say the prayers, you have to go through the ritual motions, you have to buy the mementoes to bring home to your family, you have to do all the things that pilgrims will do and you won't get energy from rest because you won't get the rest. When you go on holidays, you get energy that comes from rest. When you return home from pilgrimage in Lourdes any Easter, or any other pilgrimage you've gone on that has been serious, nobody has ever gone home from a pilgrimage and I mean home, it doesn't matter where home is, but back home. Nobody has ever gone home and said, my God, that was the best rest I ever had.

(LAUGHTER)

I really feel totally that my batteries are recharged and I just want to get back to work. Everyone who goes home from a pilgrimage goes home in fear of how they're going to cope with the first morning back at work, they're so exhausted from the time that they've spent away. The energy that comes from pilgrimage has nothing to do with rest. That is a legitimate form of energy, that comes from holidays. The energy that comes from pilgrimage comes from the threshold experience and from encountering other people, particularly encountering strangers. I've said to people coming back off pilgrimages, again as guinea pigs from what I'm trying to reflect on ... what happened to you on the pilgrimage? And when they think a bit about it, a common thread that comes up is people say to you, I spoke to strangers, they spoke to friends as well but, you know, I spoke to strangers. And what did you say to the strangers? Ah sure, I told them where I was from, I told them my name, as someone was saying this morning, I told them this and that and you begin to delve, you begin to find they've told them almost every single thing except what's in their bank account.

(LAUGHTER)

I said, what's that person's name? And do you know, I'm not 100% sure. I think she's Mary, she's from Yorkshire I think. Have you got her email address? No. Have you got her postal address? No. Have you got her phone number? No. Are you ever going to meet her again? Maybe not. But I met her there. And the very memory of having met her and having common contact and having spoken is somehow something that matters. It's not ... what happens on pilgrimage is you meet people in a way that you don't meet them necessarily at home. At home, people are generally in the way. I imagine if you're in a queue or something, they might be your brothers and sisters in Christ, but it'd be far better if they disappeared out of the queue in the supermarket.

(LAUGHTER)

If you go to a car park and there's a thousand there before you, they might be your brothers and sisters but it'd be better of if they were brothers and sisters somewhere else.

(LAUGHTER)

People are generally in each other's way. So coming into contact ... and we heard a lot today about this in terms of disability and the other abled ... but there are different ways of coming in contact with people that probably happen in the pilgrimage centre more than they do anywhere else.

And then the very phenomenal thing happens. Thank God, people go home. They go back to the centre of their lives. If by the way, you were to stay in the pilgrimage centre and that doesn't mean, whether it means the Marion shrine of Lourdes, whether it meant a mountain top somewhere because some people do that. Wherever ... if you decided to stay there, then that becomes the centre of your life. That becomes home and that becomes the most important place. But for most of us, we will naturally return to what we will call our ordinary homes, to the places from

which we came and home for all its importance can be a terribly tedious repetitive place. We do much the same thing every day, we have our work, we have our play, we have our interaction with people. It's very similar and there is a tedium in ordinary life that's a very central part of our lives. So even though the pilgrimage is over, the journey of life must continue but there is a sense and there's a lot of evidence of this from reflecting on people who've been on pilgrimage like yourselves, that home after a true pilgrimage and by a true pilgrimage I mean one that was demanding enough to make a real impact on you, not least physically as much as anything else, that after a real pilgrimage, home is never quite the same again. And let me just explain what I mean by that. Home is never quite the same again. Not because you're not going to stay there, you are. You're always going to live at home, wherever your home is. Home is never quite the same again because the question is always on your mind, will I go back to that pilgrimage centre, not to make it my home but to visit that threshold another time. Will I visit that threshold, given what happened to me there the last time? And it's not because something amazingly intellectual happened or that you'd some insight that you mightn't have had otherwise. It's simply that something occurs on the threshold of the pilgrimage centre that doesn't occur in the ordinary tedium of what happens at home.

The word that I'd like to reflect a little bit with you in this regard again is the word margin or marginal because it has come up a lot today. We talk about personal margins that people find themselves in. You could find yourself in the margin of life in all sorts of ways. There are people who are marginalised by society because of limitations, be they physical, be they mental, be they financial. There's all sorts of ways that people are marginalised. But there's also this geographical margin that I'm talking about that you can go and visit and see life in a different way. And then maybe ... and this is the point I want to come to now ... there is the most important marginality of all because it happens to all of us and it is deeply, deeply unwelcome. It is never ever welcome and that is when life does things to us that pushes us out to a margin, out to the edge of life. Not the edge physically but the edge emotionally and other ways, though it can be physical as you'll see now as well. There are all sorts of edges in life that none of us want to inhabit. The most famous ones and the most important one of all of course is the margin, the edge of serious illness. Anybody who has ever been seriously ill has lived on the edge of life and in this case

it's a literal edge. You could fall over. It's called dying. You could fall onto the other side if the serious illness took your life. Have you ever noticed the community that's created amongst those who have suffered from serious illness? They don't necessarily know each other's names but anyone who has ever been seriously ill is a member of the communion or the community called those who have been seriously ill. They have a sympathy and an empathy with one another that the rest of us can only guess at. But all of us have been members of the community of those who have been deeply worried about loved ones and friends who have been seriously ill. All of us are members of the community of the bereaved, we've all lost loved ones in one way or another and that touches us and pushes us out to an edge that we would far prefer not to encounter. The edge up against the death of our loved ones or our closest ones and their passing pushes us to a frontier, to an edge that we would prefer not to visit. Notice what happens on all those frontiers. Call them what you will by the way, the word doesn't matter that much. These margins, these liminal places, these thresholds, as I was suggesting earlier. You see life in a different way, not least imagine when someone dies or if someone is seriously ill, imagine how that changes their perception of their whole lives, not just of small things but of the meaning of their whole lives. What is my life now that my wife has died? What is my life now that I know my husband will die? What is my life now that my mother has died? What is my life now that I know that I've only got 6 months to live? And so on, whatever the example might be. These are thresholds that are completely life changing but they're thresholds, they're margins, they're experiences that we can all share in. I suggest to you that when we go to pilgrimage centres, that when we go on a pilgrimage that really says something to us, it too is bringing us to a margin. It's trying to awaken us to the fact that these thresholds which are part of all of our lives are going to hugely impact on us and have a massive impact on us in ways that we cannot even imagine.

One of the ways of course you could summarise this, and we heard this very interesting earlier from a biblical point of view, is that there are different ways of seeing things. That from the margin, from the threshold, maybe from the pilgrimage centre, you see things differently from the way you see them at home and seeing, remember, is all important. In the scriptures, in the New testament, the notion of seeing is critically important, that are all sorts of different types of seeing. And today

several times, we've heard the very powerful message that the blind can see in a deeper way than those with good sight. The scriptures endlessly make the point that seeing is not really believing, there's a far deeper form of believing of seeing that goes beyond what ordinary eyesight suggests and that's why it can be true to say that the blind can see better than those with sight.

I was looking earlier today, if you look at Rupnick's, you know, the mosaic artist who's done the new front here in the basilica, his work is very interesting. He has very notable works in many places throughout the world now. But the thing that struck me, it'll strike people differently, if you want to look rightly by the way, I think you should stand way back, come right back down here to the statue of Our Lady and look up to see the whole lot of it. And I think one of the things that stuck out for me from the mosaic are eyes. The eyes of the disciples, even from about 300 metres back, you can see these big lumps of eyes. I went up to look at them actually and they're far the biggest pieces of marble or whatever they are in the mosaic and the eyes are everywhere in the disciplines. It's as if the eyes are almost going to pop out of their heads here and there as you look around the thing and eyesight of course is a critical thing. How you're going to see and what it is the different disciples see at different times in their lives. As you're going through Rupnick's mosaic in the door, you have the wedding feast of Cain and up above it on the arms above that, is the representation of the last supper with Jesus at the Eucharist and down in the Cain scene there are of course the jars of water which are going to become wine and the wine will become as you go through the threshold of the church door into the basilica, the wine can become the body of Christ. But it takes different eyes to see things. Imagine the eyes that could see that water could become wine. Imagine the eyes that could see that wine could become the blood of Christ. There are all sorts of different eyes. Most interestingly I think in Rupnick's mosaic, there's only a couple of people with their eyes closed. These eyes are massive in all these figures. One of the figures who has his eyes closed is Jesus when he's baptised in the Jordan. As the spirit comes down upon him, his eyes are closed. In other words, it's almost as if saying that to have a true spiritual experience, to truly encounter the Holy Spirit, ordinary eyesight is not relevant at all, that there's a deeper form of seeing that's going to mean something more. And by the way, just for a laugh, definitely take a look at the mosaic. Have you seen Judas

in it? He's just fantastic. He's heading off with the bag of money, he's tearing down under the table and he's off in such a hurry, his hair gets disturbed and you can only see one of his eyes. So there's only one eye in Judas, the other eye is on the lump of money that's in his hand as he slips away from the table. There are different types of seeing but probably the most important type of seeing is seeing from the margins, looking in from the edge and therefore all of us need to visit the edge. We need to identify what the edge is in all of our own lives, what the margin is and we need to look at life from that place and we also need at least now and again to take ourselves off to marginal places, to the mountain top, the uninhabited island, the clearing in the forest, the sea shore, places that are marginal, places that are on the edge in order to see what life might be.

Have you ever noticed by the way, it's only a very small point but it's a very interesting one ... if you come up with a deep answer to this, let me know because I haven't got one myself ... that is, why does everybody who walks ... have you ever gone to the sea, to the beach, to the seaside to walk? Why is it that everybody, but everybody, but everybody who goes to the seaside ... the sea is coming in here behind me now ... OK, it's lapping up here on the wall behind me ... why does everybody at the seaside walk up and down here? The beach is behind you, the sea is behind me here. Nobody walks that way. Let's see at a big long deep beach, you know, a long amount of sand in there. Why does nobody with their dog walk that way, to and from the sea? Everyone walks this way, up and down, along the sea. And if you saw a fellow walking that way long enough, you'd probably take them aside and say, are you alright?

(LAUGHTER)

You know, the sea is over here, you should be walking this way. But of course the attraction of the sea at a deeper level is the sea, too, is the edge of things. The sea is the margin. The sea is not terra firma. You won't live on the sea, at least very few people will and it's a difficult form of life but, like all margins, it's worth visiting all edges, it's worth visiting at one stage or another in our lives.

To finish, I would like to tell you two stories of journey which we find in the scriptures. Now, this is not a good use of scripture. We had excellent use of it earlier by Nicholas and John this morning was referring to scripture as well. This is the worst possible Catholic use of scripture that you're going to hear now. This is the kind of fellow, you know, wandering on with the scriptures who could go anywhere but just see where I go with these two stories anyway. There's always been a kind of an iffy Catholic relationship to the scriptures. Nicholas was hinting at it earlier. Any time I've ever been at an ecumenical meeting, you know, and someone says, will you say a prayer, and we the Catholics will always horse into the Our Fathers, you know, something we know off by heart. Whereas someone from one of the reformed churches will always take out the scripture and begin reading a bit of it and quite properly so obviously. And then someone says, would you read a bit? And I'd say, I would but I haven't got the book and I don't know it off by heart.

(LAUGHTER)

So I'm going to tell you two stories from scripture, not off by heart. One is the story of the ... one is about mission and the other is a pilgrimage actually. The mission one is Jonah going to Nineveh. This is one of the most interesting journeys in history. Jonah was told to go to Nineveh and Jonah, let's put it mildly, didn't intend to go to Nineveh. The Lord said to Jonah, Nineveh is Mosul today, the sad city indeed in terms of trouble in Northern Iraq. Nineveh is in what's contemporary Iraq on the Tigris river and Jonah was told to go from Jerusalem, let's say at least from the land of Israel to Nineveh, which would be naturally to go east by land. Jonah went west by sea. Jonah was not going to Nineveh and so the Lord Yahweh organised that Jonah should go to Nineveh and indeed got a little storm organised, he got everyone on the board to chuck him overboard and he organised a whale to arrive and the whale arrived in the Mediterranean and swallowed up Jonah and went on a very interesting journey, if you imagine it, because there was no Suez Canal.

(LAUGHTER)

So he took himself off, he took himself off by the Rock of Gibraltar, down by the Cape of Good Hope and round the world, up the Persian Gulf eventually anyway and

up the Tigris river and the whale arrived in Nineveh and he belched Jonah out on the shore of the River Tigris in Nineveh and Lord Yahweh said to Jonah, well, what will you do now?

(LAUGHTER)

And Jonah, in one of the most remarkable theological insights in history said, I suppose I'll go to Nineveh.

(LAUGHTER)

The reality is in the scriptures that you can try and frustrate God's plan but God's plan will come true anyway, even if it involves a whale. Nobody, but nobody, including the Jew back then and are Jew now indeed now sadly, no Jew would want to go to Nineveh who had his head rightly stuck on his shoulders at all because he know what would be likely to happen to him. Yet Jonah has to go to Nineveh. Everyone has to go to Nineveh. You and I will end up in Nineveh and when we end up in Nineveh, the Lord Yahweh will say to us, what will you do now and we will say, I suppose I'll go to Nineveh.

Finally, there is a story of pilgrimage in the New Testament. It's the only one I think actually, a proper pilgrimage story that makes from start to finish and it's coming to that time of the year as well. It's the story of the journey of the magi who come from the east to Bethlehem to worship the new born King of the Jews and these guys come from the east. All mystery comes from the east. Sunrise every day comes from the east and these characters come following their star and they arrive astrologically at Bethlehem to worship the King of the Jews. They bring with them gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold for a king, frankincense for a God but myrrh for a corpse. Already this one born in Bethlehem, divine and kingly, is marked out that he will follow the way to the cross, that that somehow will be the end of his earthly pilgrimage. And notice mostly strikingly of all, these wise men go home by a different way. They have a dream. Dreams are hugely important in the history of religion. So too are visions, like those of Bernadette. Some visions, some dreams probably lead us astray but some dreams and some visions are at the very heart of

everything we mean by our religious belief. These guys have a dream that tells them to go home by a different way and so they don't return to Herod the Great in Jerusalem, they go home by some other way but the way that goes from Bethlehem will always lead us to Calvary. All of us would like to go home by the way from which we came and we will tomorrow or the next day. After this gathering here and after any pilgrimage you have in Lourdes, you will take the plane or the car or the train, it doesn't matter, we will go home the same way as we came. But not on the pilgrimage of life we won't. We came one way, we will go home a different way. We came through birth but we will leave through death and that journey from birth to death, from Bethlehem to Calvary, from the womb to the tomb, is the most important journey in life. The pilgrimages to Lourdes, to Loch Durg and to anywhere else, are critically important, not in themselves but because they might awaken us to the depth of the significance of the journey from Bethlehem to Calvary. All of us would prefer to stay on roads that we know well. Always we prefer to return home the same path that we came but we can't do it. We have to go home by the other way and the other way will disturb our cosiness, our certainty and our understanding of ourselves. We live at home now but we are on our way to our eternal home, on our way to the eternal home we will, like the wise men of Bethlehem, have to go to places that we wouldn't have imagined and we will ultimately end up sharing somehow in the death of Christ himself. The most important things in life are home, family and friends but equally what can be significant is pilgrimage because it can awaken us to an ever deeper sense of the real meaning of home, family and friends and home, family and friends of course will endlessly remind us that we are called and that we are on our pilgrim journey to our eternal home.

So thank you for your attention.

(APPLAUSE)