**Homily at Prayer for Christian Unity in the Church of Ireland, Urney, Cavan by Bishop Martin Hayes on 26th January 2025 @7.00pm.**

I begin by thanking Dean Nigel Crossey and the Church of Ireland Parish of Urney for their welcome as well as their hospitality which we will enjoy later.

“***I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die***”. In our opening prayer we have recalled this scriptural text, the words of Jesus to Martha, from John’s Gospel of the raising of Lazarus.

Our focus, therefore, is upon our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus and its implications for us – the hope that Easter provides for all of us, hope in this life and eternal life with God.

The early Christians were divided, e.g., they could not even agree on the date of Easter. In 325 they came together from East and West at Nicea, some 1,700 years ago. The Nicea Creed centred on our belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we will profess later, emerged from that first Christian Ecumenical Council of Nicea. We know that different interpretations of the Creed emerged later, and divisions remain among our different Christian Churches. Thankfully, though, the celebration of Easter coincides in the East and the West for 2025.

Our focus remains on the Resurrection of Jesus, our belief in the Resurrection which is illuminated for us by the conversation between the Risen Jesus Christ and his disciples. The dialogue between Jesus and Thomas, the Twin, ‘doubting Thomas’’, moves through the stages of,

1/ The conditional belief of Thomas – “***Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side, I will not*** ***believe”*** to the

2/ Call of Jesus – “***Do not*** ***doubt but believe”*** to the

3/ Declaration of Belief by Thomas, “***My Lord and my God***” to an

4/ Affirmation of us – “***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”***

That has been our belief and struggle since. We give thanks for our belief, our faith. We learn from our doubts and acknowledge our differences. We are united in our belief. We can proclaim with our Jewish ancestors in faith, the beginning of the prayer of the **Shema**, the first verses of our 1st Rd. from the Book of Deuteronomy, “***Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might***.” It expresses our absolute love of God, a prayer that we can make morning and night.

That foundation of declaring our love of God, our faith in God offers hope, as reflected in our Responsorial Psalm, “***Hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore***”. This is sufficient for us, and it offers calm. It helps us, strengthens us amid our realities, our divisions, to live with the imperfect.

We resolve to continue to pray for Christian unity based on the gift of God of his Son, Jesus who came among us as one of us, suffered, died and rose again so that we share “***a new birth into a living hope***” according to St Peter (NT Rd,). Again, our focus is on our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. While our faith is tested by life and by our divisions, we are affirmed once again that while we have not seen the Resurrection of Jesus, we believe. Therefore, we gather here this evening in faith. We are here to celebrate our response to the question of Jesus to Martha, ***“Do you believe this?”***

Finally, I would like to apply this question to our efforts at working towards Christian unity, and to place a challenge before us. We have not seen the Risen Jesus Christ, yet we believe. We have not seen Christian unity, yet we believe in its possibility and pray for its realisation? “***Do you believe this?”***

**END**