

**HOMILY OF FATHER JIM O'KEEFE, TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER, ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL,  
NEWCASTLE**

One morning in December 2004, 10 years ago this month, I walked across the school yard in St Bede's, Denton Burn to meet with one of the teachers. There was a light falling of snow, and it was very frosty. There was a little group of Year 6 children making a slide, so I asked them could I help and being slightly heavier, and slightly taller and having considerably larger feet in no time at all we had a pretty good slide going. So I went in to meet with the teachers and when I came out about a quarter of an hour later there was Bob, the caretaker, with his bucket of sand. Sadly the gift, the carism of fun on that occasion being shared by the children, lost out to the 'learned and the clever'. So uttering a prayer to the 'gods' of health and safety, I went into Church to prepare for Mass.

Why is it that Jesus chooses children to be the epitome of what the kingdom is about? I think there are many reasons – one of them is, I think, because children are willing to risk. If as children we hadn't taken the risk we would never have learned to read. We would never have learned to walk, we would never have learned to run. It's a risky business growing up. Fortunately most of us have guides, teachers and parents, older sisters and brothers to help us to ride bikes and to do scary things. If we had never learned to risk you would never have got married. We would never have been ordained there is a lot of risk about. Bishop Seamus this morning very powerfully introduced us to the biggest risks of all, the risk of praying. I know my mum used to have a phrase and she used to use it a lot of "storming the heavens" and I have a picture in my mind sort of SAS Catholics wielding rosary beads climbing this hill to get into heaven, but what she was really doing was trying to persuade God to do whatever she wanted. And that was her idea, we storm the heavens. I wonder if she perhaps sees it slightly differently now. It's not so much as "storming the heavens" to get God to agree with her it's perhaps a more gentle business of listening to what the Lord would have us do. And this whole exercise of moving Forward Together In Hope is an exercise of risk, but just as we had parents, and brothers and sisters and teachers to help us to learn to ride bikes and to run and to jump we are together in this, and we are yearning for something different.

Hope is an amazing virtue. There are three or four phases in it. The first one is we imagine a world and a church which is different, in which relationships are right. Bishop Seamus referred there to the perfect community of trinity. No one dominates, no one is subservient, there is perfect interaction, there is total harmony. First of all, we imagine a world and a church that is different. Then we pray for it. In other words we allow our imagination to be open to the guidance and the beckoning and the teasing of the Holy Spirit to reinforce within us this hope, this vision, this image, this Isaiah type longing. Then thirdly, we work for it. We actually put our energy into creating relationships that are different, that are equitable, that are respectful so when we are praying for this whole experience of moving Forward Together in Hope, we are very much in this all together, no one can be

excluded. Hope is a brilliant virtue because what we are doing is watering the seeds that others have planted, and planting seeds that others ahead of us will water and encourage to flourish.

So, thank you for coming and perhaps we end this wee reflection by reading the prayer together that you were given as you came in and whenever we say this prayer lets imagine a world of right relationships, a church of right relationships, lets imagine that we are open to the spirit to lead us together into this, and to use the energy that God has given us to work for it.

Glory be to the Father .....