

# Address to Sion Community on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## Introduction and Welcome

I am honoured this afternoon by the invitation to be part of this milestone event to celebrate and honour Sion Community on its Silver Jubilee. I am thankful to the Community for affording me the privilege of giving this keynote address. I wish to greet you all this afternoon in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to begin my keynote address by telling you this little story. I went to get pair of glasses last week because I knew that I would be attending a number of significant events over these days. I sat down in the examination chair with the hope of getting in and out as quickly as I could. The lovely optometrist who was doing my examination asked “what I did for a living?” A fatal question to ask for two reasons; (A) it can be quite a conversation stopper or (B) it can evoke further questions.

Unfortunately the latter was true in my case. On finding out that I am a Priest she began by saying how delighted she was that I came to her to have my eyes examined. She began by debating the issue of “creationism” and this was followed by lots of other ideas. She finally asked what prompted me to take the step to be a Priest and evangelist. This obviously brought me to the whole area of Sion and its founding and growth.

## Called to Celebrate:

What give us this afternoon, the ability and desire to be jubilant? I think that it can be described in one phrase, “Mary the Star of Evangelisation“. Although this terminology places her at the end of the major documents on evangelisation today I am putting her in pole position because of her celebratory nature.

She went as quickly as she could. She went unnoticed. Mary hurried through towns and villages, along roads and over rivers, past strangers, in a country ruled by foreigners. In her all newness was developing, from her all newness would be born. Everything around her was going on its well worn fashioned way. It was as if everything was happening, yet she was alone with her pregnancy and her promise. If the Roman security forces stopped her, she could have thought, “if only you knew the Lord of freedom that I carry”. When she would have stopped to buy some food she could have thought “I am carrying the bread of life”. But nobody knew and nobody guessed. She knew and she believed, Joseph knew and he believed. Who else but they? No one until that moment she met Elizabeth who exclaimed, “of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42).

Then Mary, could not contain herself and burst out into song that is repeated each day by all who say the Divine Office. “My soul proclaims the greatness of God and my spirit exults in God my saviour” (Lk 1:47). These two pregnant women needed each other, which explains Mary’s haste. We too need that kind of affirmation and joy. We too still need to hear that the world is still pregnant with God’s life, even and especially when nothing seems to be happening.

Leaving our faith dimension unspoken and unsung affirms it neither in ourselves nor in others. Isn't this joy what we need most in our time, when believers sometimes see doubts creep into the hearts of the best of us. Isn't today a great day for all of us when we enact that dramatic scene from the final days of Christ's life when he said "if these should be silent then the very stones would cry out" (Lk 19:40).

However this is a great day for Sion Community and we can truly say "Lord it is good for us to be here" (Mt 17:4). We are here to celebrate the being and achievements of an emerging community. Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned. However, each Community is unique in identity and charism. Each Community is built upon pillars or rocks of strength which help shape their being, focus and work. Sion Community is founded on five pillars and I would like to give a little time to each of these five pillars.

### **(1) The Holy Spirit**

"Since we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit"(Gal:5:25)

In every generation people are born who bring renewal to the Church, despite the sorrows and negative aspects of her journey. Such a renewal however, cannot be brought about through human effort alone. Peoples' endeavours to lead an interior life of prayer are only a preparation, a way of making ourselves sensitive and responsive to the action of the Holy Spirit. This is particularly and specifically true of Sion Community.

In the Holy Spirit we are invited to profess, live and share our faith in the presence and in the action of the Holy Spirit and to invoke his outpouring upon us, upon the Church and upon the whole world. We are called to own, with special intensity, the Church's invocation: "Veni, Sancte Spiritus!"

It is such a simple and immediate invocation, but also extraordinarily profound, which came first of all from the heart of Christ. The Spirit, in fact, is the gift that Jesus asked and continually asks of his Father for us his friends; the first and principal gift that he obtained for us through his Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.

The Gospel of John which has the Last Supper as its context, speaks to us of the prayer of Christ. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples: "If you love me, follow my commandments; and I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Paraclete who will remain with you forever" (John 14:15-16).

Here the praying Jesus is revealed to us. This prayer reaches its apex and its fulfillment on the cross, where Christ's invocation is one with the total gift that he

makes of himself, and thus his prayer becomes, so to speak, the very seal of his self-giving for love of the Father and humanity. Invocation and donation of the Spirit meet, they interpenetrate, they become one reality. "And I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Paraclete who will remain with you forever."

In reality, Jesus' prayer -- that of the Last Supper and the prayer on the cross -- is a single prayer that continues even in heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus, in fact, always lives his priesthood of intercession on behalf of us the people of God and humanity and so prays for all of us, asking the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The account of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-11) presents the "new course" of the work that God began with Christ's resurrection, a work that involves humanity, history and the cosmos. The Son of God, dead and risen and returned to the Father, now breathes with untold energy the divine breath upon humanity, the Holy Spirit. And what does this new and powerful self-communication of God produce?

Where there are divisions and estrangement unity and understanding are created. The Spirit triggers a process of evangelisation of the divided and dispersed parts of the human family. People, often reduced to individuals in competition or in conflict with each other, reached by the Spirit of Christ, open themselves to the experience of community.

The Holy Spirit can involve them to such an extent as to make of them a new organism, a new subject: a new Community with a new focus. This is in effect God's work.

It was and is from this that Sion Community derives a practical criterion of discernment for living and ministering the Christian life. When a person or a community, limit themselves to their own way of thinking and acting, it is a sign that they have distanced themselves from the Holy Spirit. The path of Christians and of the particular Communities must always confront themselves with the path of the Holy Spirit, and harmonize with that Spirit.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit through the Apostles, together with the faithful of different communities, carried this divine flame to the far corners of the earth; in this way they opened a path for humanity, a luminous path, and they worked with God, who wants to renew the face of the earth.

Enlightened and comforted by these words of life, Sion lifted and lifts up this invocation: Come, Holy Spirit! Enkindle in us the fire of your love!

We all know that this is a bold prayer, with which we ask to be touched by the Holy Spirit of God; but we know above all that this flame -- and only it -- has the power to save us and drive us forward in the ministry of evangelisation.

However no Community in the Catholic traditions is alone in following the Spirit. We are part of the universal Church. Sion Community was formed within the shadow of Vatican 2. This brings me to Sion's second pillar, the Church.

## **(2) The Church**

### The Second Vatican Council and the New Evangelization

As is well known, Blessed Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council to be the moment of renewal for the Church in the modern world. The world had changed a great deal since the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the so-called Enlightenment, and the secular revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Church now found herself beset on all sides by a world that could no longer understand her, and from within by an unfortunate tendency to isolationism, fearing engagement with a rapidly changing world.

In opening the Council, Blessed John XXIII stated that the "greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council" was twofold: "that the sacred deposit of Christian faith should be both guarded and taught more efficaciously". [Oct 11 1962] Later in the speech, he elaborated on this: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another". [Oct 11 1962.] The teachings of the Church, our identity and culture as Catholics, must be loved and guarded, yet brought forth and taught in a way understandable to the modern world.

Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II constantly preached the same thing in calling for a "New Evangelization" of the faithful, our separated brothers and sisters in Christ, and all those who do not know Jesus Christ or the Church. This New Evangelization was to be "new not in content but in ardour, methods, and expression." It is readily apparent from his teaching and ministry that for Pope John Paul II, the New Evangelization was the true fruit of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, the Council was the beginning and blueprint for evangelization in the modern world. He explicitly stated this as his particular mission at the time of his election, and he lived it to the end [Oct 22 1978, His inaugural speech]. He spent his entire pontificate interpreting and implementing the Council's documents according to the light of the Holy Spirit, given in virtue of his office, amid the changing circumstances of the Church and the world.

We now find ourselves 46 years since the close of the Council. Many questions still need to be asked and answered. Have we understood the Council within the context of the entire history of the Church? Have we read and understood the documents well? Have we truly appropriated and implemented them? Is the current state of the Church what the Council intended? What went right? What went wrong? Where is

the promised “New Pentecost”?

Pope Benedict XVI reflected on these important questions in an address to the Roman Curia in December 2005.

"The question arises: Why has the implementation of the Council, in large parts of the Church, thus far been so difficult? Well, it all depends on the correct interpretation of the Council or -- as we would say today -- on its proper hermeneutics, the correct key to its interpretation and application. The problems in its implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face to face and quarrelled with each other. One caused confusion, the other, silently but more and more visibly, bore and is bearing fruit”.

"On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call 'a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture,' it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the 'hermeneutic of reform,' of renewal in the continuity of the one subject -- Church -- which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.

"The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church. It asserts that the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council." [Pope Benedict Dec 22 2005]

Notice, first, Pope Benedict’s honest acknowledgement that the implementation of the Council has been difficult and is not complete. Notice also his clear-sighted grasp of how two rival interpretations have led to different “camps” within the Church. This division has weakened our identity and mission.

It is crucial that we all grasp that the hermeneutic or interpretation of discontinuity or rupture, which many think is the settled and even official position, is not the true meaning of the Church. This interpretation sees the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Church almost as two different churches. It sees the Second Vatican Council as a radical break with the past. There can be no split, however, between the Church and her faith before and after the Council.

Therefore, we must heed the Holy Father’s point that one interpretation, the “hermeneutic of reform,” is valid, and has borne and is bearing fruit. This hermeneutic of reform, as described above, takes seriously and keeps together the two poles of identity (the ancient deposit of faith and life) and engagement with the world, teaching it more efficaciously. Lastly, the Holy Father, going into greater detail later in the address, explains that the “spirit of Vatican II” must be found only in the letter of the documents themselves. The so-called “spirit” of the Council has no authoritative interpretation. It is a ghost or demon that must be exorcised if we are to proceed with the Lord’s work.

### **The Current Context**

There was a great excitement immediately after the Council: excitement for

innovation, change, freedom, renewed dynamism. There was a great desire to implement the Council immediately, with the best of intentions. In doing so, the Church after the Council achieved many things. The Council's enthusiasm brought about a great breath of fresh air, a new freedom and excitement about being Catholic. However, this era of change and freedom took place during a most tumultuous time. The 1960's and 1970's brought about a wholesale change within our culture and society, so that it seemed that everything was "up for grabs." The Church seemed to be going the same way as society, suggesting that nothing was certain or solid. If the Church could change some things, it could change anything and everything. Sometimes we set out to convert the world, but were instead converted by it. We have sometimes lost sight of who we are and what we believe, and therefore have little to offer the world that so desperately needs the Gospel. A pendulum effect began in the Church and has not yet stopped swinging. In the effort to correct exaggerations or one-sidedness in various areas, the reform often times swung to the exact opposite pole.

This pendulum swing can be seen in some areas of popular piety, catechesis, ecumenism, morals, and political involvement, to name just a few. It seems to me that in many areas of the Church's life the "hermeneutic of discontinuity" has triumphed. It has manifested itself in a sort of dualism, an either/or mentality and insistence in various areas of the Church's life: either fidelity to doctrine or social justice work, either Latin or English, either our personal conscience or the authority of the Church, either choirs or contemporary music, either tradition or progress, either liturgy or popular piety, either conservative or liberal, either Mass or Adoration, either the Magisterium or theologians, either ecumenism or evangelization, either rubrics or personalization, either the New Catechism or "experience"; and the list goes on and on! We have always been a "both/and" people: intrinsically traditional and conservative in what pertains to the faith, and creative in pastoral ministry and engaging the world.

My brothers and sisters let me say this clearly: The "hermeneutic of discontinuity" is a false interpretation and implementation of the Catholic Faith. It emphasizes the "engagement with the world" to the exclusion of the deposit of faith and evangelisation. This has caused some problems for the Church, because it tended to dismantle the Catholic Faith to please the world, watering down what is distinctively orthodox, and in doing so becoming somewhat irrelevant and impotent for the mission of evangelisation in the world. The Church that seeks simply what works or is "useful" in the end lacks its prophetic edge.

Our urgent need at this time is to reclaim and strengthen our understanding of a true evangelisation. We must have a distinctive identity and culture as Catholics, if we are to effectively communicate the Gospel to the people of our day, as well as engaging in effective dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters of other denominations. This is our mission of evangelisation. Notice that this mission is two-fold. It is toward ourselves within the Church (ad intra), and it is to the world (ad extra). The first is primary and necessary for the second; the second flows from the first. This is why we have not been as successful as we should be in bringing the world to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ to the world. We cannot give what we do not have; we cannot fulfil our mission to evangelize, if we ourselves are not evangelized. [E.N. #15] Hence our third building block.

### **(3) Evangelisation**

There is no doubt that evangelisation is a topic on the lips of missionary minded Christians today. However, when Sion was founded it was a more controversial topic, often misunderstood and feared as a Protestant concept. Yet, it is the deepest desire and function of the Church. As Sion is at the centre of the Church it took upon itself aspects of this great mandate of evangelisation.

The whole People of God are encouraged towards a deeper awareness of Christ's missionary mandate to "make disciples of all peoples" (Mt 28:19). In this Sion I think had and has a prophetic voice.

"The pagan nations will live by its light" speaks Revelation (Rev 21:24). The goal of the Church's mission is to illumine all peoples with the light of the Gospel as they journey through history towards God, so that in Him they may reach their full potential and fulfillment. We should have a longing and a passion to illumine all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood.

It is in this perspective that the disciples of Christ spread throughout the world work, struggle and groan under the burden of suffering, offering their very lives. I am only reiterating what is so frequently affirmed by the Church.

Sion in the midst of the Church works not to extend power or assert dominion, but to lead people to Christ, the salvation of the world. We seek only to place ourselves at the service of others, because we believe that "the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today... is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1), which "has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself" (Redemptoris Missio, 2).

In truth, the whole of humanity has the radical vocation to return to its source, to return to God, since in Him alone can it find fulfillment through the restoration of all things in Christ. Dispersion, multiplicity, conflict and enmity will be healed and reconciled through the blood of the Cross and led back to unity.

Sion's mission is to spread hope contagiously among peoples. This is why Christ calls, justifies, sanctifies and sends us to proclaim the Kingdom of God, so that all may become the People of God. It is only in this mission that the true journey of humanity is understood and attested. This universal mission should become not just for Sion but, a fundamental constant in the life of the Church. Proclamation of the

Gospel must be for us, as it was for our forebears in the faith,, a primary and unavoidable duty.

However Europe is still in a period of transition regarding its attitude towards faith. I am at times tempted to think that our task would be easier if we lived in a totally secular Europe where there was no need to pretend a type of faith veneer as a form of social trapping. We still talk about religion; we are open to and indeed welcome some expressions of faith. There are certain things which strike cords with people.

What is clear to me is that many are in search of something and I think that they assess us in terms of our integrity. People may have little affinity with institutional religion but they can respect the personal integrity of those who belong to the institution, even those of us who are leaders within it.

The culture into which Sion was founded is empirically different to that of today. Lots of negative publicity, some would say rightly so, have influenced peoples minds regarding Christ and his Church. I think therefore, that to witness effectively today we must be credible witnesses to the values which underlie our belief. We must witness with integrity. We must witness to the transcendent God and the change which it brings to the way we live. Realising that God is transcendent influences the way we look at the immanent of the day to day realities of life.

The future of faith in the market place of today's Europe depends on the question of integrity. The danger is that the Church might be tempted by a widely secularised society which still lives with vestiges of faith, to reduce its task to being a type of religious veneer. We could become a Church that speaks of God but which at the same time becomes tolerant of everything, a feel good religion. Jesus did not come to make people feel good, but to challenge them about the good and the true. Our greatest contribution to this society will come through our being authentic and demanding and uncompromising in presenting the values of God. In this regard I see us in the imminent future interfacing with the world particularly in the area of morality.

In order to be sustained and strengthened to carry out this work we need the security, empowerment and support of Community. Herein lies Sion's fourth pillar.

#### **(4) Community**

In speaking so far about the Holy Spirit, Church and Evangelisation I could be accused of treating it exclusively as merely personal. Yet all of these are rooted in the sacraments and therefore must be communitarian. For all that I have spoken

about so far to be healthy, then, it has to be planted in the life of community. One great gift that God has given to us today is a new insight into the necessity for community. The Church herself realises that she is first and above all a community. She reflects the Trinity. This same insight must be reflected in Sion's life too.

But what exactly is Community. How does the grouping together of people gifted with the charism of evangelisation fit into a gospel life? Externally, community is togetherness. Most of Sion live together, we pray together, we share meals, we work on teams, we share from common funds. But there is a deeper significance to this togetherness.

We can begin by listing certain values that living in community has. Coming together makes for efficiency and stability. We can achieve our ideal with greater assurance if there are a number of us together. In our serving evangelisation we can work better if we work as team. Living together as a community is helpful as it provides the emotional support we need. Living together is also challenging - a challenge that is good for us.

However, we need to look beyond these very important and evident values. We need to see community as mystery. We need to recognise that the living together of Christians has a value in itself, over and above the good that it can bring to each one of us.

For most of us the mystery of the Trinity is a mystery to be researched or worshipped at a distance in reverent silence. We associate the mystery of the Trinity with the inner life of grace and divinity. God is one God, yet he is three persons. We have accepted this as fact, but we have neither understood, nor see it as relevant to our lives. It is part of God's mysteriousness, but it has not touched our lives.

In our present day culture of individualism the mystery of the Trinity holds a central and very important place in life. It is in no way a mystery of divine secrets only. It is a mystery that speaks most eloquently to us about the meaning of life. It shows us the pattern along which life is arranged and lived. In God there are three persons, each different from the other and yet all three marvellously one God. This is the pattern of all life, difference yet unity. Each person is him/herself and yet each is part of a unity.

Growing and coming to completeness involves two things, becoming one's true self and taking one's place in society. Distinctiveness and togetherness outline the pattern of human development. The Holy Spirit we have received is a spirit of distinctness and of unity.

Being together has therefore, a value in itself. A Christian community reflects and shares the pattern of the Trinity. It is good in itself for a community to come together, because we can be so task orientated that we can forget the element of “they also serve who only stand and wait”. The element of mystery in community life can be passed over, yet it too is evangelistic.

However each community has an apostolate and Sion is no different. For that apostolate to be carried out I come to my fifth pillar of Sion - a ministry of collaboration.

### **(5) Collaboration**

Collaboration is built on the conviction that the Church is called to be an evangelising Church, bringing the Good News into every segment of society. It is about Priests, Religious and Lay working together in mission. It was Pope John Paul who said that in order to meet the contemporary demands of evangelisation “the collaboration of the laity is becoming more and more indispensable”. Note the word “indispensable” as distinct from a good idea. He went on to counter those who believe that we are doing this primarily as a practical response to the decrease in the number of priests and religious. He addressed this by saying “this is new and unprecedented opportunity that God is offering us”. Sion saw and holds dear that collaboration utilizing more fully the gifts of all the members is God’s will for us.

Ministry is the obligation, privilege and responsibility of every baptised Christian. Collaboration is based on the conviction that one hundred per cent of the baptised are called and gifted for ministry. Yet I think that for all of us 4 “C” are important, (A) clarity, (B) conviction, (C) commitment and (D) capability.

“Clarity”: We need to be clear on what we mean by collaboration. Where there is a lack of clarity the result will be ambiguity and confusion. The word collaboration can have many meanings. Once the concept is clarified the next step is “Conviction”. Collaboration flows from an understanding of community which stresses the need for the entire people of God to weave their gifts together in every Gospel and outreach project. When this conviction is present then we will realise that working together is messy and difficult. There will be disagreement and even conflict. We need to realise that it is worth the effort. If we are not convicted of the need to collaborate then we condemn the Church to be a Church of maintenance and not mission. In fact I will go further and say that the Church will begin to disintegrate. The third “C” is “Commitment”. Even if there is understanding and conviction collaboration will still fail if there is little commitment to action it. This one is the key. Many people have excellent reasons for being convinced but also have many reasons for avoiding it. The primary way in which collaboration becomes a reality is when individuals engage with it. The fourth is “Capability”. This area is basically developing the skills for collaboration. This involves the ability to develop “other-centeredness” as distinct from “self-centeredness”.

While collaboration is necessary in every part of the Church it is particularly relevant to us in Sion.

## **Sion's Future**

It goes without saying that our future is in the hands of God, yet, we too have an integral part to play.

Today's society and that of the future is and will be very different from Sion's founding culture. To minister in this emerging society will mean change. However, with deep genuine prayer and intercession, if acknowledged and rightly used this change can be the spur for a new productivity. This change can and should emerge with the desire of people who have the courage of an ultimately inspired "creative imagination".

As I see it, there are three broad categories of communities, traditionalist, adaptationist and reformist.

Those who hold to the traditionalist model of community view the world as unchanging. There is therefore, no need to alter one's apostolic methods, what was suitable for yesterday is equally apt for today and tomorrow. Creativity is fostered only to the degree that it helps to maintain the same types of apostolic approach that was used yesterday.

In the adaptationist community people do recognise that change is necessary if the community is to survive. An example of this is filling clerical positions with laity only because there are not enough clergy. If vocations were to increase then the laity could be replaced with the new religious. There is creativity here but, of a highly restrictive type. Only pragmatism, based on the need for survival has encouraged a temporary change.

However the teaching of the Church says "Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way to the continual reformation of which she always has need..." (Decree on Ecumenism chapter 2 # 6 Vatican II). The reformist communities have both the continuity with their founding charism but at the same time are able to put aside those incidentals that hinder or obstruct this charism from being related to the needs of a rapidly changing world. The words of Pope Paul 1V are always very apt for us when he says,

"We should always wish to lead it (Community - Church) back to its perfect form, on the one hand corresponding to its original design and on the other fully consistent with the necessary development that like a seed grown into a tree has given the Church its legitimate and concrete form in history" ("Ecclesiam Suam" in Acta Apostolicae Sedis no 56 1964 p 630).

In this reformist sense Sion is still called to be a prophetic community. It is called to uphold the founding charism in all its purity while at the same time it is called to be relevant to the contemporary world.

For this to continue we are in constant need of the gifts, both natural and supernatural of the Holy Spirit. The way to union with Christ is not always easy and therefore needs constant prayer augmented by a deep sacramental life. The road to apostolic ministry must always be paved by the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this way we will bring out of the store room things both old and new.

### **Conclusion: Let us Celebrate!**

I am going to end by returning to my initial starting point namely that of celebrating.

If festivity were to vanish from peoples' lives; if the overburdened consciences of us Catholics caused us to say "no" to happiness offered us eight times by the Sermon on the Mount; if Sion Community and all gathered worn out by activity, were to lose the source of the Spirit of celebration; if joy and happiness faded away from us, where on earth could still be found the springboard for joy hope and communion?

It is this thirst for joy that I sense among you our young people. For you as for every generation it is strong to the point of anguish. It is this thirst for joy that us older people long for so that the struggles and aspirations that the years bring, can lift our confidence and bring us close to the smiling God who says to Mary "rejoice you have won favour with the Lord".

If the sense of festival fades with us, will we still have the energy to keep searching ever anew for evangelising the rising generations.

I warmly honour you all as members of Sion Community. I wish also to acknowledge those founding members who are present here today, those who could not be present and those who have gone to their eternal reward. I wish also to acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude those former members who are present and those who could not be with us. Over these 25 years our Community has been helped in no small measure by all of you present here and also scores of people who could not make it today. God bless and reward you all for your kindness and generosity.

I hope that these words from Ecclesiasticus can put it more prayerfully, powerfully, poetically and poignantly.

"Next let us praise illustrious men (people)... some wielded authority... and were renowned for their strength, others were intelligent advisers... others directed the people by their advice... and by the wise words of their teaching, others composed... and set down ballads... some... have left a name behind them, so that their praises are still sung. Others have left no memory... (yet) in their descendants there remains a rich inheritance born of them. The people will proclaim their wisdom; the assembly will celebrate their praise".

God bless you Sion on your twenty fifth anniversary.

Amen.