

## Homily for the Dedication of Studies Mass, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Russia, the Tsar, Alexander III, wanting to give his wife something unique as a present for Easter, commissioned the most gifted jeweller in Russia, and possibly in all Europe, to prepare something exquisite. Peter Carl Fabergé, the man who received this commission, set to work with the finest and most precious materials and stones, and created a jewelled egg, perfect in its small scale conception and realisation, and in every detail, even down to the portrait of the Tsarina in enamel. So began an extraordinary series of creations by Fabergé's jewellers, who produced an egg, in the same extravagant but miniature style, every year until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 intervened.

The Fabergé eggs have become almost mythical – some in private collections, some in museums, and others lost. Each was unique. Each crafted with exceptional attention to every detail. Each a delight for the eye and an endless source of fascination for those who looked on them and pored over the wonderful and delicate craftsmanship. And each containing within itself a surprise – a tiny clock in full working order; a delicately worked reproduction of one of the royal palaces; an perfectly executed rosebud.

Why do I speak about the Fabergé eggs? Because in them I find an apt image for our College community and all that we hope to achieve here. We have, in this Cistercian College Roscrea, the possibility of producing our own priceless miniature – with every detail of our lives attended to and crafted with loving care, producing something unique, exceeding value and price.

In this College we live as the bearers and receivers of tradition – what has gone before us in the College and which has been passed on to us. You are men who receive a mission to be lived now – a life of discipline, a love of learning, a desire for a Christ-centred community. And the invitation is always to live in an imaginative way, always asking how our life here, the gifts we share, the struggles we face together, prepare us for the future.

I look, for example, at our 6<sup>th</sup> Years and 5<sup>th</sup> Years: young men who are already becoming examples of leadership and service for one another and for the College community as a whole, conscious of the example they give and how that shapes those who look up to them. They are young men who even now, today, accept the responsibility of their senior position in the house – be that in the classroom or in study as they go forward to their Leaving Certificate; on the pitch or in the liturgical and prayer life of the house; at the common table and meals shared together; in their bearing with one another and supporting one another.

Look at our Transition Year students – rising to the challenge of leaving behind their junior years at the College and beginning to accept more and more the responsibility which they have, personally and as a class, in their study, recreation and growing maturity and confidence. In this year they are asked serious questions about the tasks which they will take up in their last two years at the College, and how to begin that mature discernment about the next steps which they will take.

Look, again, at our 3<sup>rd</sup> Years – this year they are asked to rise for the first time to the challenge of public exams and so must enter a new phase of work and learning which will stretch them in new ways. The business of their life here at the College has taken on a new gravity, and invites a more thoughtful and responsible attitude from them.

Look, for a moment, at our 2<sup>nd</sup> Year students – the novelty of their first year is gone and now they realise that their time at the College requires effort, collaboration with their teachers and with one another, becoming a part of the detail of this house and its ideals.

And look, finally, at our 1<sup>st</sup> Years – excited by the newness of this life, in this new environment, which they have undertaken, faced with a whole host of new experiences, but already being moulded as part of our shared identity and heritage at Cistercian College. Just by being here and entering into the rhythm of life here, we hope that they have begun to know that they belong here too.

A College can be notable for its buildings and surroundings, the resources which never change – and we are no different. A fine College building with excellent provision; grounds which are second to none; pitches which serve every sporting need; an identity which has been shaped over these last 105 years, and further back with our distinctive Cistercian monastic ethos.

But the real life and identity of the College finds its home and its finest expression with the people who live and work here. The College exists in the community which lives and works within its precincts – you, my dear gentlemen, are Cistercian College, Roscrea. And above all the College wants to make sure that no young man who passes through here leaves untouched or unchanged; and every man who comes here has the potential to change the College for the better. Each of us is made the more rich by our experience here, and the College is enriched by your being here.

To give responsibility, gentlemen, to another is always to take a risk – the risk that they will not live up to the challenge, to the burden of the tasks committed to them; that they might use their position and recognition to control others, lord it over them and treat them with a certain disrespect; that they will not have the maturity – or the humility - required for this sort of service on behalf of others.

And yet every man in this house has a responsibility firstly to himself – to make the best use of his time, of the resources at his disposal, of the friendships which support him, of the relationships which challenge him. And then, from that, a great responsibility for the men around him must be evident – that begins by leading with example, by the seriousness with which we treat our time here.

We change one another not so much by what we say as by what we do - by who we are and by how we live. That, after all, is the very heart of the values which serve as the foundation of our life in this College, and which are outlined in the College Prayer Book – we share them, teach them, grow in them, individually and together, by trying to live them out, struggle with them, strive for them, on a day to day basis: love of God and one another; the prayer that we share; our sense of belonging here and becoming part of the fabric, living and breathing; our desire to keep growing and maturing; the self-discipline which we discover in class, sport, music, our shared and blessed meals; our listening deeply to one another and responding with respect which is obedience; our sense that we form a living and unique community, not mirrored in any other community, because you are the community, gentlemen, here at Cistercian College Roscrea.

Gentlemen, it is often said that you young men are the future of the Church and of our society. And of course, you are. But much more importantly, you are not only the future, you are the present. This is the moment which God gives us to live our lives as fully as possible – these very days are yours, when together you build something wonderful, unique, more precious than any Fabergé miniature, because you, and all of us, are the precious details, expertly crafted, which ornament this College of ours. And as with the Fabergé egg

which always contained within itself some delightful surprise, so with you and all of us - hidden in our midst, waiting to be shown forth, the greatness of Christ within each of us. That Easter Fabergé egg which, in all its fabulous smallness, remaining a timeless symbol of the resurrection, Christ's new life, is the invitation to all of us to find within ourselves the glory waiting to be brought forth, a glory which comes from within, the hidden greatness of Christ wrapped up in the smallest detail of our lives and efforts.

In the Book of Proverbs there is a line which says, *without a vision the people perish*. Without an ideal for which we strive, which we can follow and work for relentlessly, we die. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, in all that we have here, all that celebrate here, all that we share and struggle with, we could make that vision a reality now? Believe me, the only thing that we really need to achieve this is our willingness and desire to see our College become this precious miniature, in which every detail is to be crafted, enjoyed and valued. Can we make this vision a reality? I believe that it can be so, and with all my heart I want you to believe it as well.