

Homily of Archbishop Leo Cushley of St Andrews & Edinburgh
St Margaret's Pilgrimage, 8 June 2025
Dunfermline

My dear friends,

Welcome to Dunfermline for our Pilgrimage in honour of our great queen, St Margaret. I'm grateful to Fr Syriac and the people of St Margaret's parish, including Ronan and Amanda, the musicians and singers, the helpers and volunteers, and everyone in Dunfermline for their warm welcome to the town. I'd also like to thank the Reverend Mary Ann Rennie, Minister of Dunfermline Abbey, and her parishioners for their kind welcome this morning to the abbey, where we celebrated an ecumenical service in honour of St Margaret.

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Although we have gathered here to honour Margaret, today is the feast of Pentecost, when we recall how the risen Lord gave the Holy Spirit to his apostles and, through their successor the bishops, to the whole Church for all time. Those of us who have been confirmed share in that same spirit, and that probably means most of us here today, except the very little ones. Today is a momentous event in the life of Jesus's followers because it is effectively the birth of the Church, with the living Lord at its very heart. And so, it is very hard to overstate the importance of today's

feast and why it naturally takes precedence over our celebrations of Saint Margaret at this Mass.

In today's gospel, you may have noticed how the Lord, when he appears in the upper room to the eleven, starts by saying, "Peace be with you". He lets them see that he is truly there in the flesh. He has been mysteriously transformed as well, but precisely how, we're not told. We then hear him repeat his greeting "Peace be with you". I don't know if you've noticed, but this greeting of the Lord is echoed every time the Bishop starts Mass. You may have noticed that today, after the sign of cross, I said to you "Peace be with you": this greeting is reserved to the Bishop, and I believe it's a deliberate, direct link back to the apostles who received that peace from the Lord, and that the Lord gives to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. So, in some way the greeting "Peace be with you" is meant to be constitutive of the assembly as it gathers around the Bishop.

Saint John the Evangelist, the one who wrote today's gospel, probably did so as a very old man at the end of the first century. Those were turbulent times for the Church, and some were already saying that Jesus hadn't risen from the dead or that he was just a ghost after the resurrection, and so on. St John, writing in his gospel, does not attempt to explain the presence of Jesus, but he lets *us* know that *he* knows what he saw: it was true, it was real, and it was also mysterious. However it happened, it *was* happening: the living Lord was truly among them, he drew them together, and in the midst of the turmoil in their hearts, as well

as the turmoil of Jerusalem outside, he drew them to himself and restored the peace in their hearts.

The next generation of the Lord's disciples, already around before John died, included a young man called Ignatius, now known to us as St Ignatius of Antioch. We have some of his writings, including some beautiful letters written by him as he was taken under guard to be executed, and so becoming a martyr. He said many things of note, but one of them was, "Where the Bishop is, there is the church". This is something that has come down to us from within living memory of the apostles, and it's one of many very precious comments and pieces of wisdom to come to us from that first generation immediately after the apostles.

There was very little peace in the Church at the time, and there was very little peace towards the Church from outside. But Ignatius leaves us a very important insight into how we gather together and how we ought to behave towards each other. It's often been a way of saying that, no matter what is happening, providing we stay close to the Bishop we will know that we are on good ground. For bishops too, by analogy, we believe that, no matter what is happening, providing we stay close to the Bishop of Rome, to the pope, then we know that we are standing on good ground. We don't always know everything that is going on; we do not know why the Bishop takes the decisions that he does, or why the pope takes the decisions that he does, but we believe and we trust and we unite ourselves around him, and we move on.

You will also notice that, during Mass, we have a sign of peace just before holy communion. Pope Saint Gregory the Great is a very important figure of the sixth century, and it's understood that he moved the sign of peace at Mass and placed it where it is today, just before we receive holy Communion. It is thought that he did this quite deliberately, in order to demonstrate to us all how closely receiving the Lord, and holy Communion, and the peace that we share with each other are linked. The sign of peace isn't just a handshake or a peck on the cheek. It is a profoundly significant symbol of the communion that we have with each other in Jesus Christ. It is not to be shared lightly. Rather, it is a simple but effective way of expressing something very profound that comes from the living Lord himself on Pentecost. Just as we share holy Communion today with each other, let's also notice when the sign of peace comes along just before Communion, that in our handshakes and our embraces, we are saying something much more important than just the fact that we like each other or that we're ok to roll along with each other. We are making a pledge to respect each other, to love each other, to trust each other in Christ. We are making a gesture of communion gathered around our Bishop, and we are making a gesture of union with the universal church, scattered throughout the world, but united in communion with the successor of Peter in the See of Rome. As you know, the latest successor of Saint Peter, has just been elected. All of us now look to Pope Leo for unity, for guidance, and for that essential sense of communion that we must have with each other if we are to be the faithful disciples that the

risen Lord at Pentecost draws us together to become, and that he wishes us to be.

Thank you again for joining us to honour our great patron Saint Margaret. Thanks for listening, and may God bless you all!