

## FAREWELL HOMILY

*From Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew's Farewell Service January 17<sup>th</sup>*

While I was at Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, I was given the text of a homily delivered by Cardinal Deardon, who was Archbishop of Detroit for 22 years. On more than one occasion, I have turned to this homily for strength, encouragement, and reorientation when I have felt overwhelmed, inadequate, uncertain, or confused. For a variety of reasons, it has become for me somewhat of a spiritual classic. I have recommended it to some of you in the past. This afternoon, I would like to share an adapted version of Cardinal Deardon's homily because I think it speaks so well to this occasion. I pray that while I may have adapted some of the particular wording that the basic spirit and message remains the same. (The text below in italics is Cardinal Deardon's homily with my adaptations included.)

*Today, I would like to look at our time together in the EOA not from the perspective of all the things we have done, what we have accomplished, and how far we have come, but rather from the perspective of all the things we didn't do, the things left unaccomplished, and how far there is yet to go. At first, that may sound strange, even a bit irreverent and inappropriate. But it is not meant to be so. Quite the opposite. It is meant to be very, very reverent and appropriate. It is meant to remind us all, and perhaps most especially me, that what we have done, and what we are doing, has such breadth, depth, and grandeur that it could never be accomplished in a lifetime, let alone a single pastorate. We are about God's work, not our own. It is God who builds the house, not us. We are sowers of seeds, not reapers of the harvest. We preach the Kingdom begun, not the Kingdom accomplished.*

*It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.*

*What all this comes down to is the realization that everything we do is incomplete. We have to approach it that way, with humility, a sense of mystery, a profound reverence. That is not always an easy thing to do. There is something in each of us that makes us want to do a complete job and call it our own. We are driven toward wholeness. For many of us, we want to experience the fulfillment of rounding things off nicely. We want to finish them, settle things before moving on to our next task.*

*It can't be done. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us. No sermon says all that should be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program fully accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. We just listened to Paul speak of planting a seed, watering it, and then acknowledging that God gives the growth. He also spoke of laying a foundation upon which someone else would build. That is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development.*

*All who have this perspective have an important key to happiness and holiness. They can be happy because they do not need success measured in this world's terms. They can be holy because they accept one of Jesus' most basic formulas for holiness, namely, becoming like a little child, realizing that without God we can do nothing, realizing that Christ is the vine, we are the branches.*

*To say that what we do is incomplete is not to say that what we do is unimportant. It becomes even more important because it is part of something greater than meets the eye. It is as important as planting is to the harvest, as a foundation is to a skyscraper.*

*We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very, very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opening for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master Builder and*

*the worker. We are all workers, not Master Builders. We are all ministers, not Messiahs. We are all prophets of a future that is not our own.*

*We celebrate this in every Eucharist. We hold in our hands the mystery of the "already" and the "not yet." That is why so many invariably make the Eucharist the center of their spiritual life. Amid all the tasks and worries and hopes and dreams that are so incomplete, we celebrate the coming of the One who is both the alpha and the omega. Every thing comes together when we hold up the communion elements and say, "Through Him, with Him, in Him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, Almighty God, forever and ever. Amen."*

Thank you. Thank you for granting me the honor and privilege to be a co-sower, a co-laborer, a co-builder with you for these past four and one half years in the great, continually unfolding mystery that is the Kingdom of God. May you continue to strive to discern the will of God in whom we live and move and have our being. May you continue to be transformed by the Christ who resides within each and everyone of you, and may you continue to draw strength from the Holy Spirit who unites you. Amen.