

# ADDRESS TO SION SCHOOL WORTHING 20<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Lady Mayor, Rev. Fathers, Sisters, Mr. Scullion, Staff, Governors, People of Sion, pupils past and present, friends..... a very happy jubilee celebration to each one of you.

It is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school – so it is three times the biblical jubilee of 50 years. But what are we celebrating?

We are invited to celebrate, to sing and dance, to rejoice and exult with all our hearts because of the marvellous things which God has done through Theodore and Alphonse Ratisbonne and through each one of you who are members of the Sion family.

What does that mean for each of us?

150 years ago, a foundation of Sion was established here in Worthing. At the invitation of Bishop Grant of Southwark, the sisters were invited to take up residence here in the south of England and to be involved in education. Bishop Grant invited Sr. Desiree to the little town of Worthing, situated by the sea. At this time Major Gaisford wanted to have a catholic presence in this completely Anglican town. The bishop dreamed of this mission being greatly helped by the establishment of a teaching community. One of our founders, Theodore, went immediately to Worthing in order to view what was on offer. Theodore wrote "Worthing is a delightful place, the upper classes go there in crowds. Catholics have neither a church nor spiritual help, so they are very anxious to have our foundation." A large house, suitable for a boarding school was rented, and Theodore continued "How much joy and consolation the foundation of Worthing gives me!" Following this period, a workroom was founded at Worthing for the poor and Theodore rejoiced again because an extra effort was made to welcome them, he said "It is a great joy for me to learn that Sr. M. Cuthbert shelters poor children under the umbrella of Sion – you must love these little lambs; you must especially edify them and bring them up piously" – another example of how respect of the other would develop.

At the beginning these days were not easy. The Sisters were not welcomed by all, milk and other deliveries had to be made in the early hours of the morning, so that those who did not welcome the presence and arrival of the sisters could not object. But truly believing in the message of Sion, respecting the other and reaching out to our neighbour, the charism of Sion developed. Today, we celebrate 150 years of academic excellence in the mission of our founding Sisters.

To be part of Sion means that we truly value the other. We respect and honour each other and rejoice in our differences. We are in dialogue with the other.

Across the continents this message is echoed in every Sion school. This is what makes us unique – what distinguishes us from other schools.

For 150 years this message has continued to develop here in Worthing – it is a great part of the education of the young people who are taught in our schools. For Our Lady of Sion School this is what makes the difference.

Over the years, the school has developed in many ways – from initially being a boarding and day school for girls only, then in 1980's , there was the appointment of the first lay head, and a further development when the school became co-educational.

Our school motto, here in Worthing, "Consideration Always" reflects the dialogue which we are invited to engage in - to reach out to the other and to call each person my brother and sister.

Amongst us here today, there are many past pupils, who hopefully have been enriched by their days at Sion. And to our present pupils, I say also, "Be proud to wear the Sion Badge and be engaged in a dialogue with those who are different from you. Respect one another and always reach out to the other.

"In Sion Firmata Sum" – this is the motto that each Sr. of Sion carries on her ring. "I am firmly established in Sion". Hopefully this is the motto that each person connected with Sion bears. To be firmly established in Sion, in respect and dialogue with the other so that each one of us can make a difference.

Rejoice and exult for each one of us has been given the opportunity to bear the name of Sion.