

## **Summary of address by Sr. Pereka Nyrienda Cois Tine 23 Feb 2008**

Sr. Pereka said that our first task in approaching another people, another culture is to “take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy ground”...that God was present before our arrival and will remain there long after we are gone. It was with sense of reverence that she was going to share her experiences of living in Ireland.

She said that her initial memories of her stay in Ireland were characterised by a sense of friendliness and a healthy curiosity from the Irish population. However she also experienced some incidents of racism.

She also recounted the arduous experience of applying for residency. This involved long hours spent waiting in the cold, experiencing the intransigence of bureaucracy and the sensing of inhumanity and loneliness she felt while negotiating the system. Nevertheless she felt blessed in the sense that she had a community to go to, of welcome and support. Many immigrants however, do not have this support.

With regard to the liturgy, church and spirituality the following points were made.

- When Sr. Pereka first came to Ireland she spent time searching for a Parish where there was a sense of ‘Sabbath’ on Sunday. Where there was more to the Eucharist celebration than the week day Mass. A Parish where she could feel at home and where there was participation and a sense of celebration in Sunday Liturgy- she learnt that some people spend time searching for the quickest Mass.
- She had a few experiences that saddened her at what seemed like calculated time people want to spend at Mass. She gave the example of a Mass she attended that went on a little longer than usual because of an

ordination that was taking place. The Mass took a total of one and a half hours but very few people stayed till the end of Mass, most people walked out, some even as early as at the offertory time( which by then was a hour into Mass time)

- Some things else that Sr. Pereka had encountered was some people's reaction when one sang along with the choir during Mass. Some people would turn to look at you, as if it was strange for one to be singing.
- Sr. Pereka also spoke about the opportunities she see in Ireland that she saw were not being tapped into. There seems to be a big educated population of laity that have studied and are studying Spirituality/theology etc, but they do not seem to be visible in parishes. She felt an opportunity was being missed to engage and involve the laity more and more in the life of the Parish.
- The validity of a specialised Mass for Africans or the Polish communities was questioned. Do they help or hinder integration in the Church? Periodic special Masses would provide and maintain the sense of identity required by such diverse groups; otherwise a culture of separateness is cultivated which can be harmful in the long run.
- Interculturalism was identified as a way forward as opposed to assimilation whereby newcomers are expected to become like the majority, adapting its values and culture – whether in our society or church we cannot expect newcomers to become just like us.
- Each culture must be recognised and valued within the Church – each can maintain their own identity.
- Integration is a two way process requiring adjustment by both parties, host and immigrant alike.
- There is a need to be vigilant re parallel systems operating to the exclusion of others and disaffecting both communities in the process.

