

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The email arrived. ‘We thought it was in October’: Happy St Wilfrid’s Day! Which of course **is** in October. Today isn’t our Patronal Festival (St Wilfrid’s Day) but a Dedication Festival. Here today, we have come together to celebrate and give thanks that on this very day 100 years ago, this building – well, apart from the south transept, lady chapel, cloister, Hall and Cottage – which should keep me in centenaries for a few years to come – was dedicated, blessed and consecrated.

Yet now, we’re getting into a whole load of technical words, and you may begin to fear a rather academic treatise... Throughout the past century a great many words have been uttered here. So let’s begin with the fundamental question: why have this building at all: what is it?

The answer to that is deceptively simple. Tradition and law throughout the universal church make clear – it is a space for: an altar, a place for the proclamation of scripture and a font (we take it as read that four walls and a roof are required, and are helpful). Everything else is nice, even beautiful. But an altar, lectern or pulpit and font are the only three absolute necessities. This place is, first and foremost, before anything else it might ever be, for the worship of Almighty God. Font and Altar remind us that at the core of Christian being is the call to be Eucharistic people: or as the great French theologian Henri de Lubac puts it: “the Eucharist makes the church”. SO what we gather to celebrate is the anniversary of the consecration of a building to be a place of the Eucharist. A place where, and certainly in the Catholic tradition that is steeped in this place, this offering to God of prayer and praise, of bread and wine is our ‘core business’ what we are all about. Without that, this is nothing more than a big shed. A beautiful shed. An architecturally splendid shed. A grade 1 listed shed. A very expensive to maintain shed.

It is set apart for daily worship because the Christian life isn’t a call to a ‘turn it on and off when you want it’ lifestyle. Baptism consecrates and dedicates us to God 24/7 – or more poetically as George Herbert put it “Seven whole days, not one is seven” This place is here because it calls us to become the people God wants us to be, consecrated and dedicated to him each day, every day.

Yet the stones of this building are more than all this. Layered, built upon this foundation as a place of daily Eucharistic worship are a multitude of other functions. It is a place for other services, but more than that too. It is a place of heritage that helps tell the story of a community. It is a parish church – a place for all who live within the boundary of this parish which first came into being on this day 100 years ago. It is a place for calm and contemplation, for arts and music, for young and old, for saints and sinners. It is, as it has been since its dedication a place for all to seek and find God, whether they come with Christian faith, another faith or know no faith at all.

It sometimes surprises people that over 1000 people each week use this whole site. Churches now, as in centuries before are used for a multitude of other activities. The vast majority of those 1000 use or hire our hall for an ever increasing range of activities. That must be right. A parish church (and all its facilities) are not provided for use simply by a cosy club of like minded religious enthusiasts – nor may our facilities be only used by those who pass a dubious ‘entry test’ deemed worthy to cross the threshold and join our social circle. That too often is a fatal misconception that befalls Christians. No. This is set apart for all – and our duty as custodians who pass through this place is to welcome all, without preconditions suspicions or judgements. For together we are strangers and pilgrims.

The story of this place, of its function, its uses, its history and its future is inseparable from the story then of those who have gathered here, worshipped here, prayed here. The readings the church provides for us, that we’ve heard tonight all call us to how a foreboding and distant God comes to dwell amongst his people. Here we meet a God who loves and saves us. But here we meet also a God who our vocabulary, all our words can never adequately describes: a God who cannot be simply contained within these walls as though imprisoned in a box. This is a God who dwells in the midst of us. This is a God who we must wrestle with.

Our second reading reminds us that our attempts to control or chain down God are futile. He cannot be tamed by our opinions, tastes, likes or dislikes, he cannot be dictated to: he does not skip to our agenda not even a PCC vote can change God! Rather it is here that we are called to the vision of the new Jerusalem: to touch and taste something, however imperfect of heaven. Here we are to be inspired, dazzled, awestruck, changed and transformed: so that we might better be and become what God wants us to be – rather than hoping it might be the other way round.

That is costly for God. He sends his son, to die and rise as the ultimate sacrifice for us. We don't need the blood of bulls and goats to offer as in the temple as a sacrifice for our sin. The blood that Able sprinkled on the temple seat in the holy of holies at the annual sacrifice for sin is replaced now by the blood of Jesus shed in his sacrifice of himself on the cross – that which we share through his very body and blood we receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. That is indeed a great cost to God, an amazing gift to us. What about us, what cost does this demand?

We of course are to be sacrificial people who give of ourselves in thanksgiving to God. It is, after all though, much easier for us. Bread and wine and the offering of our money are easier. Members of the congregation all received a letter asking them to consider brining a centenary offering in thanksgiving (and thank you in advance for your generosity) – that is rather easier than if the cultic sacrifice we offered today had meant I’d asked you to bring a goat or bullock.... Though it would have made for an interesting spectacle on the Duchy Road...

When Jesus looses his rag with the traders in the temple precincts as we heard in tonight’s Gospel – one of the often most misinterpreted passages of scripture - he

does so for two reasons. He does so because those who must provide temple coinage and sacrificial animals are ripping people off – he acts, if you like, as the religious equivalent of a trading standards officer. But he also does so to because of those whose attitude is to want it on the cheap, who themselves defraud the traders, or believe they don't have to help or be generous, those who say 'you don't need to do that', the sour carping critics, the idle bystanders to injustices, wanting others to work off their sins. It is both the sellers AND the buyers Jesus remonstrates with.

This place is indeed a house of prayer. But it is so much more. And it is costly. And God asks much of us. It reminds us that we have much to give, just as those who with noble hearts gave. As we celebrate our centenary we give thanks for those who have gone before, for those who are here now, and those as yet to come, in a future as yet unknown. But for this to be that place of daily worship, sacrifice, service in that time to come a great responsibility is given to us now. For this place to continue and flourish, needs work, and yes money our time our love and engagement and our support.

Beautiful as this place is, to maintain it is as we all know, costly. Regular members of the congregation are well aware of our development plans: our need to improve heating (two of our three boilers don't work now, and the third, well, lets just say is in intensive care) and lighting, access, (I normally mention the sounds system at this point at my peril...). Such things don't these days come cheap: with architects, surveyors, builders, VAT and fees, the cost for phase 1 of what we would like to do is £2.2million.

That's a lot of money for us to find.

Faith, learned here though, tells us that what we cannot do is loose heart in securing and preserving this place, to do all the things it, and we, can do here, for future generations. The God we worship who loves and provides so much will help us. And he does that through not only us, but through so many other people who become touched and moved by this place and the story that it tells, the hope and comfort it brings. It would be all too easy to become naysayers and doom mongerers – when all that this place stands for reminds us that hope and love are the virtues that inspire us and that we must be confident in our vision of the future. For our God will help us to achieve what he asks of us.

And I can prove that.

With serendipitous pleasure, I am able to announce today that after careful consideration, the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded us an initial development grant of £150,000 to work up our plans. This what is called a 'stage 1' pass - a critical hurdle – a green light to as we are now encouraged to submit a full application next year for a grant of £1.5million. Yes, that still means there is a lot of money for us to raise, and a lot of work to do. But it is a wonderful opportunity.

This place of prayer, this gate of heaven isn't just for us. It is for all. Here we meet the God who consecrates the hearts of all believers that we might live in service for him,

just as those who built this place have given us a living legacy. As we celebrate in the temple on this day, let us then be filled with confidence that our God is with us, he feeds us, loves us and calls us his own. He commands us to share the Good news of the faith with those we meet. He raises us up that we might touch the very bread of heaven for here we have come to that great banquet, city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. We celebrate 100 years of witness in this place and the blood and sweat and tears, the joys and sadnesses, triumphs and disasters, hopes and fears that for 100 years have been each day put before God in trust and love.

A great many words have been uttered in this place in the last 100 years – some of you may by now be thinking “a few too many from you tonight as well”! Let us, dear friends be confident not just in our past but in the future, that here, in this most special place, words will continue to echo the praise of God, long after our voices here fall silent. Let us be renewed in that same trust as we move into a new century of worship here. 100 years are past. The next 100 dawn tomorrow. In thanksgiving for all that has been, and all that will be: for the work now committed to us in the service of the Gospel for the renewal of our lives as the living stones of God’s temple and for the work and witness of this place: thanks be to God. Amen.