

Homily: Feast of the Dedication of the Cathedral

Preached at Lancaster Cathedral by Rt Rev. Michael Campbell OSA, Coadjutor Bishop of Lancaster
5th October 2008

We gather this morning in joy to celebrate the Dedication of this Cathedral of St. Peter. It is an impressive and beautifully adorned cathedral, a house of God of which we are rightly proud here in the Diocese of Lancaster. We heard in our first reading the prophet Isaiah foretelling the day when the Temple of God will become a house of prayer for all the peoples of the earth. That prophecy has become a reality here in this Cathedral, when so many believers over the years down to the present day come together to pray and worship in Christ's name to God the Father. As we recall the day of Dedication of the Cathedral, we make our own the sentiments of the psalmist: *this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!*

Yet our Cathedral, splendid as it is, only comes to life through the presence of those who worship here. Saint Peter has just reminded us that we baptised believers are the living stones constituting a holy building which rests on the only possible cornerstone- Christ himself. Through our baptism we have become united with Christ and so form a single holy temple, the dwelling place of God's Holy Spirit. *"I will live among them, and they shall be my people and I will be their God"* (Ezekiel 37:27). In one of his sermons for the dedication of a cathedral St. Augustine told the assembled faithful, "This is the house of our prayers, we ourselves are the house of God." (Sermon 336).

Saint Peter urges us to set ourselves close to Christ who is the living stone, rejected by men but precious to God and chosen by him. We do that by living faithful Christian lives, responding to the grace of God that has been given to each one of us. To be a Catholic Christian in our society today is both difficult and challenging. Yet to take up that challenge is what St. Peter means when he speaks of us being living stones in the temple of God. We must not be afraid to witness to our catholic Faith, the power of the Holy Spirit will not fail us. And here in Lancaster we are particularly blessed and inspired by the courageous witness of our Lancaster martyrs. By their martyrdom for the faith of Christ they have passed on to us a precious inheritance which we must not squander.

The recent shocks which have so convulsed the financial markets of the world were a stark reminder to us of how fragile the structures of our society can be. The ground beneath our feet is less solid than we might think at times. Christ responds to Peter's magnificent confession of faith in him as Son of God by declaring that this faith would be the rock on which his Church would be built. The feast of the dedication of the Cathedral calls us to renew our faith in Christ the Messiah and Son of God. Then we will be able to lead lives of confidence and without fear of the storms of opposition or hostility which may come our way. Let Christ the Lord be our rock and the source of our strength, and let us in our day be living stones in his temple, worthy of the name!

Sermon at Vespers: Feast of the Dedication of Cathedral 5th October 2008

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The marriage-image is an image favoured by Scripture to describe the relationship between God and his holy people. An image of great tenderness and intimacy: a marvellous expression of the unbroken love of God for his people. Almighty God's love for us resembles that deep unyielding love a husband has for his bride.

Our little extract this evening from the Book of Revelation speaks of the fulfilment of that spousal union in heaven, when God the Father and his Son, the Lamb of God, with the Holy Spirit, will dwell permanently in the midst of the heavenly Church.

As we, the earthly Church, the pilgrim people of God, make our way through history with all its shades of darkness and light, we are here reminded of our final destination: the vision of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the unending glory and splendour of heaven, in that life eternal which awaits us.

Our life of faith here on earth is a preparation for the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb, where we pray that we will be welcomed as good and faithful servants. The feast of the Dedication of the Cathedral, the house of God here in Lancaster, reminds us of that abiding and eternal Temple in which faith will give way to the glory which will surpass all our expectations.