

## DEDICATION OF ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH BURNTISLAND

HOMILY PREACHED BY FATHER KEVIN GOLDEN, ST THOMAS OF  
CANTERBURY, ARBROATH

THURSDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2009

Here we are, ready to dedicate: We have gathered ourselves, listened to the word, and now, on this historic night, we are poised to call out for help to our ancestors the Saints, in a litany of song, most notably calling on your Patron, the husband of Mary, on whose feast this dedication falls. Then we will smear oil on walls and on an altar in the gesture of anointing, solemnly kindle a fire for incensing, and then light this place with the light of Christ.

We are set to use mighty physical symbols, primal symbols, as we seek to express our dedication of this place. The real mystery is that in this process it is God who is dedicating us, making us the Church, empowering us.

For: *what is this place where we are meeting?*  
*Only a house, the earth its floor;*  
*Walls and a roof, sheltering people, windows for light,*  
*and a door open to the world.*

Yet it becomes a body that lives, when we are gathered here, and know the nearness of our God, the God who is working his purpose out among us. He has worked it out in this space as year gives way to year, and in this area in a particular way since the first chapel was dedicated to St Serf in 1243. In a sense, this place has already been dedicated, it has already been made a holy place, a place to take off your shoes as Moses experienced, because it has been a place where God has met his people and has guaranteed to do so. That makes for holy ground when the Divine One meets with the faith of the human ones. The contemporary hymn writer, Fred Pratt Green, in penning a hymn for the dedication of a church begins:

*God is here! As we his people, meet to offer praise and prayer*  
*may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share.*

A ritual and symbol of this liturgy and dedication as it unfolds reveals who our God is and who we are: His beloved children, that is our deepest, truest identity, and what a cause for celebration and ritual that is!

For no people is a people – or at least a people that will have an influence on society or history – unless it has common rituals. For Catholic Christians, the overriding common ritual to express identity, belonging, remembering the past and hoping for the future, is the celebration of the Eucharist. The reason churches were built was so that the Eucharist can be celebrated in them. In the earliest days of course there were no church buildings – the Eucharist was celebrated in people's homes. Only as the Church grew did buildings become necessary that were set aside for communal gathering. But they all were built for the same purpose, and all contain the same mystery – whether the greatest historical basilicas, or parish churches like this, they were all built so that the Eucharist could be celebrated and the mystery given an earthly dwelling. Churches are beautified so that the liturgy can be celebrated with dignity and honour to the mystery. The mystery of course is Christ, Christ among us.

Therein lies the reason for this building: A place to celebrate and to celebrate worthily, a gathering space for us to meet the mystery.

This present community of faith meeting its God here is a result of the bringing together of the communities of Aberdour and Kinghorn amalgamating and forming a thriving community, also drawing members from Dalgetty Bay, Kirkcaldy and beyond.

All this from early beginnings, and since the first Mass in Burntisland post-Reformation was said at 12 Somerville Street in 1877; and from then on the needs of the local Catholics were served by priests based in Kirkcaldy, from 1886 in a chapel in Kinghorn Road. Another chapel, Our Lady of the Assumption was opened in Kinghorn in 1922. In 1930 a separate parish from St Marie's Kirkcaldy was erected consisting of Burntisland, Kinghorn, Aberdour and Inverkeithing - (the latter becoming a parish in its own right in the late 1970's).

All this is history but it is also His Story – God's story, God's purpose being worked out in the local church.

At a key point in his first letter to the church at Corinth Paul reminds us of what has to be the centre of their existence, their identity and their reason for being: This is what I received, he announces, and in turn passed on to you.....and then what does he do? He gives them the narration of supper, the Passover supper which would become the narration of the Church's story at every Eucharistic gathering since.

He does that, so they will come to know that their true identity is expressed, strengthened and made most visible when they gather again in the Lord's name, on the Lord's day, for the Lord's meal. Paul handed on that tradition to the Corinthian people. And that same tradition is ours.

The scripture stories do not end with the gospels, the letters of Paul or even the book of the apocalypse. Jesus Christ continued to write his story on our hearts: It is in your story as the church in this parish – from its inception until now – and into a future which is not yet known, the stories of your faith, its joys and its troubles, have become the story of the Church, they have become a living scripture.

Now these walls will be steeped in the prayers and songs that your faith will call forth from you; these walls have already soaked up the faith of your parents, and those you have looked up to and those we have respected in this parish.

This has been, and will be, a house of mysteries. Things of grace will happen here that are never seen, words said that will never be heard out loud, a thousand saints of nameless faces have muttered words not meant for human listening, as every person stutters out to God here their needy situation.

No one will ever tell, for no one will ever know, the true depth of all that happens here. Between what looks like bread, and the angsts and hopes of human consciousness spills into the chalice, not just the wine to become Christ's blood, but the restlessness and neediness of our own particular worlds. Like children unashamed, we tell the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament thoughts we could not tell another person.

Here we can place our trust, against the constant fear of nothingness, of unworthiness. Here we find shelter and can build a house on rock. Here we find something to hold on to when all we love is dying. Here is where those who have gone beyond, meet with us left behind. Here our past and present meet.

This is a night to remember: It is a liturgy to savour, and an experience to hold dear, because it is God's work, this gathering, God who from the beginnings of this church has worked his purpose out, right down to Lent and St Joseph's Day in 2009.

Fred Pratt Green continues in his hymn for the dedication of a church:

*Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold. Here, as bread and wine  
are taken, Christ sustains us as of old.  
Here in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive,  
we who cannot live without you, we adore you, we believe!*

May the memory of this gathering sustain the growth of your faith in this Eucharistic community, from generation to generation. Amen.