

Anniversary of the Dedication of the Abbey Church  
(Ephesians 2:19-22 / John 4:19-24)  
18.01.2022

The solemn celebration of this day which marks the anniversary of the Dedication of the abbey church is not about bricks and mortar – however important these are when it comes to this edifice from an architectural perspective. The solemn celebration of the anniversary of the Dedication of this abbey church should not stop just at what we see – the physical building and the activities lived herein. A danger for us might be to stop short and focus on what is external – what is visible to the eye, what is external... even the various liturgical actions lived in this building. That could distract us from what is essential, where, or rather upon whom, our focus should be fixed today: the person of Christ! He is in our midst. He is (certainly He should be) the centre of all that we live in this place! We are called *to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth*. The Gospel passage heard today reminds us that. This should lead us to live everything we accomplish in this place at the level of our hearts. Again and again the prophets of old reminded God's People of that when they became too attached to externals – even the temple building – they risked losing their way. As Church, we have to remember that what really matters is not the external form our liturgical celebrations take on, but that what is lived in our worship stems from a true relationship with the Living God.

As monks of Holy Cross Abbey, the word of God I hear addressed to us today is a little line taken from the First Epistle of Peter which ties in with what Paul had to say to the Ephesians in the text heard in our first reading. I think of what we read in 1 Peter 2:5: *Remember, you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. Recall that you are being built up as a spiritual house*. The terms *living stones* is used there as a metaphor to illustrate how it is vital for us to have an intimate relationship with Jesus... who was Himself described by Peter, in another little verse placed just prior to that I quoted an instant ago, as *Himself the Living Stone*. Let me cite Peter's words for you: *As you come to Him, the Living Stone – rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also are living stones, being integrated into the edifice of His spiritual house*.

At one point the apostle Paul speaks of the importance of our reposing our lives upon Christ *the foundation stone*; the importance of our aligning ourself to Him *the cornerstone*. The words inscribed on the cornerstone of this church building are taken from his Letter to the Ephesians: *Jesus Christ is Himself the cornerstone*. In that little verse the apostle speaks of Jesus as *the keystone* in much the same way as Peter speaks of Jesus as *the Living Stone*. In these texts, and in many others, Christ is presented as *the One who holds the whole edifice of the Church together*. In 2 Corinthians 5, for example, Paul will tell us that *as living stones we have new life in Christ*; while Johannine teaching is that *as integral parts of the household of God we find our stability, our security, in Christ*.

In light of what we read in the New Testament, we can take it that Jesus, who is *the Master Builder*, has placed the *living stones* who constitute His house of Prayer here in Kilbroney just where He would have us be to serve His good purpose. As brethren of Holy Cross Abbey, we are called today to dare to believe that the Lord has led each one of us to where He wants us to be. Here we are called to live in intimacy with Him and also connected with each other in *the one Body of Christ which we form together*.

While the metaphor of *stones* is important – it hints at solidity, so too is the adjective used to describe the quality of the stones we are called to be: *living!* We are called to be *living stones*:

men and women who are *fully alive in Christ*... men and women animated by the life-breath of the Living God.

Saying that, I find myself thrown back to the story of humanity's creation in the Book of Genesis. (We have been listening to the early chapters of that Book at lauds on weekday mornings since the start of Ordinary Time in the Church's liturgical cycle.) In the creation story itself – and in other subsequent biblical texts – we are reminded that we were *fashioned out of clay*, albeit that the earth from which we were made had the very breath of God breathed into it. Just as the fragility of both Adam and Eve soon became apparent in the creation story and very quickly led to what is often referred to as *the Fall*, so we were born of frail and fallible parents. Called to be *living stones, bricks in the building which is God's house*, we must remember that bricks are but hardened clay. We are clay that has gone through the process of being baked in the kiln, as it were. This kiln I see to be the testing fire of suffering in our lives. For, this too – like every other experience – can and will have contributed to our becoming who and what we are today... who and what we were always meant to become according to the vision the Lord holds in His heart for our lives. St Paul reminds us, *everything we undergo in life – everything! – can be used by God, turned to our advantage*. Aware of the fact that we were at the outset just *clay of the earth*, we might ask how it came about that the Lord ever considered us to be suitable material for the building and maintenance of His house. How could we – people of weak flesh, far from convinced of our spiritual worth, or maybe even just having the rudiments of a spiritual dimension to our lives – ever have been found suitable for the great work of God which is the building of His house? Here we are sent back to what really matters in every good work: God! It is the Lord Himself who is the origin and source of all that is good within us. It is God's Holy Spirit at work within us who accomplishes whatever good we are given to undertake. It is the action of His grace which is made manifest in and through us, who are but feeble sinners – referred to at one point in the Gospels as but *useless servants*. As *living stones* we are called to be animated by the Spirit of God. We are called to realise that what really matters is God's own life at work within us – animating our whole being, giving direction to our lives.

The life of God is something we are called to experience together. The Lord lives and manifests His mighty power in all of us *together*. Hence the importance of our striving to be one. Hence the importance of our aspiring to become reconciled; being made one again – one anew – with Him... and with each other in Him.

It is only when we allow ourselves to be built *together*, in communion with fellow *living stones*, that we can become *the spiritual house of the Lord* – a house in which there are many rooms, as Jesus tells us in His Farewell Discourse. It is *together* that we form Church, *the Household of God*, a space which is open and ready to welcome all who come to Christ in their great diversity.

I consider this day to be one of privileged community celebration: a day in which we are invited to recognise each other for who and what we all are in the light of Christ. I see it as a day in which to celebrate our having been brought together, called to be united. The Lord brought each one of us to this place in ways we would never have dreamed of if we lived our lives simply *off our own bat*. I believe that we as a community have been united to create *something beautiful for God*, following the instructions the Lord Himself gives us... and this with our many contrasts and our great diversity.

We are called to carry everything that makes us the persons we are into the task confided to us.

I see this *day made by the Lord* as an occasion for us to recognise the importance in the Lord's service (and indeed, the blessing for us) which is the celebration of the Divine Office, which

St Benedict calls nothing less than the *Opus Dei*: the *Work of God*. Our *singing of God's praises* many times each day in this church building stands at the heart of our lives. It gives them their true meaning. As monks we are called to offer to God what the Second Vatican Council calls *the humble and noble service of the Divine Majesty*. St Peter reminds us that we are *living stones chosen to sing God's praises*.

Our listening to God's word in Sacred Scripture – its proclamation through the readings listened to in our celebrations and the efforts made to open up *the treasures both new and old* contained therein, through the ministry of preaching and teaching, is also of great importance, because, as the Church teaches, *the inspired word of God is the basis for all true Christian spirituality*. At the heart of everything lived in this place, the sacrament of the Eucharist is central. The celebration of the Sacred Mysteries should well and truly transform our whole way of being. It should lead us to *become Christ*. He is the One we celebrate at the Holy Table. He is the One we receive when we respond to the invitation: *Come to My Table... Take and eat. This is My Body given for you!*

Entering into the church for this celebration all the monks venerated the altar. I suspect that as they kissed the altar, one after another, each one will have recalled the grace of his monastic Profession. We will have recalled the wording on the Chart we signed upon the Eucharistic Table that day, promising the Lord and the community to remain committed to the way of obedience and conversion of our way of life, in stability. I propose that as the gifts of bread and wine are placed upon the altar at the Offertory, we all renew in the secret of our hearts an intonation of the *Suscipe*, the chant intoned to manifest the self-giving oblation we made with our monastic Profession. Let us present our lives to the Lord afresh on this Solemn Feast. Let us make our offering *one with Christ...* called to be *one in Him*. As we do so, let us think of all those who were or who are associated in one way with the establishment, construction and on-going life of this *House of Prayer for all God's children* – among them our oblates, novice-oblates, benefactors and friends (living and deceased), our many ecumenical partners, the local Church in which this abbey is called to bear witness, the people of God of this area in which we live.

On this day – which is the first in the Great Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – let us echo the prayer of Jesus inscribed upon the icon of the cross to which we look on entering this building. Let us pray with Jesus and in His name: *May all be one!*