

Alston Lane – 250th Anniversary, 14th June 2015.

(Ezek. 17:22-24; 2Cor 5:6-10; Mark 4:26 -34)



Seed, sowing, planting, growth, are key words in today's Scripture readings, and indicate how the Kingdom of God, inaugurated and preached by Christ, develops here on earth. Christ draws on the familiar world of farming and the countryside, using images and pictorial scenes which his hearers in Palestine would readily have recognised.

We too are conscious of the cycle of nature and the gradual evolution of the seasons which permit the farmer to plant and sow, be patient, and then reap when the harvest finally comes. While this process appears natural, it is also mysterious. The manner in which tiny seeds can apparently fall into the ground and lie there dormant for a time, then when their time comes they grow and produce a harvest of wheat, corn, and so on. The wonder and the mystery of nature!

The beginnings of Our Lady and St. Michael's parish here in Alston Lane, and Catholicism in the wider area, may well be compared to the scattering of a few seeds two hundred and fifty years ago and more, which have gradually grown and have yielded the harvest we see today of a flourishing and worshipping Catholic community. A significant anniversary, such as two hundred and fifty years, should cause us to pause and reflect on the Catholic heritage which has come down to us, and the debt we owe to those priests and people who have gone before us. At this juncture I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the long and generous years your present parish priest, Canon Doyle, has given to Alston Lane parish.

The words of the Lord to his disciples in John's gospel are appropriate here. He reminds them of the truth of the saying: '*One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.*' (John 4: 37-38). It is therefore with gratitude that we celebrate this anniversary, and commend to God's love and mercy all those who have lived out their faith and attended Mass in Alston Lane through thick and thin, in good times and in bad. As the Lord says, we are entering into their labours.

It has now fallen to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to continue and take forward the Catholic inheritance which has been bequeathed to you by our forebears in the faith. Treasure that faith. Don't take it for granted or shrink from bearing witness to it. Hand it on to the next generation, for it is the pearl of great price which has been entrusted to us. The Lord in today's first reading promises through the prophet Ezekiel '*to plant a shoot which will become a noble cedar.*' Join me, your Bishop, in praying today that the noble cedar of faith will continue to grow and flourish here in Our Lady and St. Michael's parish, Alston Lane. Amen.

+Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster