

## Homily for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Mary's Church, Fleetwood, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017

(Ezekiel 47: 1-2, 4-7; Apoc. 21:1-5; John 4:19-24)



The prophet Ezekiel in his vision of the renewed Temple in Jerusalem spoke of the marvellous, life-giving waters which flowed from the sanctuary, from beneath the altar of the Temple. From there God would give divine life in abundance to his people. As we gather to give thanks to God this evening for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the opening of St. Mary's church here in Fleetwood, we think of the great and countless graces – the living waters - which Christ has bestowed on his people in St. Mary's throughout those years. Think of the number of Mass which have been offered at this altar, the Holy Communion received, the baptisms conferred, the Confirmations administered, the marriage vows exchanged, and the faithful believers who began their final journey into eternity from this church.

St. Mary's has and continues to represent a great deal more than a building: it is a tangible and powerful expression, a manifestation, of a community's living faith and hope in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. It is here that the story of our faith has been told and retold for the past century and a half, and where generations have been nourished with the sacraments which Christ won for us by his death on the cross. In our gospel passage the Lord told the Samaritan woman that the hour was coming when true worshippers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and those words of the Lord have been a reality here in this church.

This parish church of St. Mary is also a place of memories and associations, memories of those who have gone before us: generations of parents, grandparents, relations and friends who have called the threshold of St. Mary's to encounter Christ in his love and mercy through word and sacrament. Part of our thanksgiving to God this evening is the thought and the memory of that 'great cloud of witnesses' of this parish who have preceded us, and for whom we pray. We recall particularly that first generation of priests and people for their vision in building this impressive church, their strong faith, and love of the Lord. As the saying goes, we are standing on their shoulders.

A parish church is a gathering place, somewhere we meet for spiritual refreshment, and find mutual encouragement for the journey towards our true home which God has in store for us, the heavenly Jerusalem so wonderfully described by St. John in our second reading from the book of the Apocalypse. Here on earth we are a pilgrim people, and we look forward to the promise of heaven where the trials and tribulations, the "tears and sadness", which so often afflict us here on earth will be no more. The parish church keeps the flame of that hope alive, and brings us together as Christ's people, Sunday after Sunday, shedding the light of the gospel on our lives.

May St. Mary's church continue to be, as it were, a lighthouse of the faith, a beacon reflecting the light of Christ the Saviour to all who pass through its doors. Amen!

+Michael G Campbell OSA  
Bishop of Lancaster