

**Anniversary of the Dedication of the Monastic Church**  
**(Ephesians 2:19-22 / John 4:19-24)**  
**18.01.2014**

This morning we heard the apostle remind us that *we are members of God's very own family, citizens of God's country who belong in God's household along with every other Christian.* In the text read for our first reading at this Eucharist the Apostle Paul went on to encourage and exhort us to *join together as parts of a beautiful, constantly growing, temple for God.* The apostle made clear to us that *we are called to be one with Christ, united to Him and to each other, by the Spirit, so as to form a dwelling place for God.*

These words which I have just reiterated using a different translation to that of the lectionary capture the essence of Paul's teaching given to the Ephesian Church.

We could say that the whole purpose of Paul's writing the Letter to the Ephesians was to strengthen the believers of Ephesus in the realisation that the health and well-being of their Christian community depended upon their close relationship with God and with each other.

Our reading of this same epistle should help us see that this is still the case for us.

It should help us grasp that the health and well-being of our monastic community here at Holy Cross Monastery (as is the case for Christian communities everywhere) depends upon the close relationship of us its members with God and with each other.

Our commemoration of the Dedication of this church building and monastery as a *House of Prayer for all God's People* should have for effect to make us want to become more and more *one in Christ*, one with God and one with each other.

It should also lead to a renewed commitment on our behalf to live and work and pray for the unity of all Christians.

I hear the call addressed to us as a community this morning as being a call to rebuild our life together on the firm foundation which is Jesus Christ.

Yes, I believe the call addressed to our community and to all of us here this morning is a call to get off to a fresh start with Christ.

Upon our fresh start with Christ depends the health and well-being of our relationships with each other.

For some weeks now a line addressed to his spiritual sons by St Francis of Assisi keeps coming back to me.

It has resonated within me every time I have recalled that today's celebration marks the tenth anniversary of our presence here in Kilbroney Valley.

St Francis is reputed to have said to the friars he had gathered around him, some time after they had been together, living in fraternal union and going about their ministry in the service of God's People: *Brothers, let us begin now. For, up until now we have done nothing.*

While St Francis' words present a challenge to us, I don't hear them as a message of discouragement.

To the contrary, I actually hear them as transmitting quite a refreshing and encouraging message of hope to us.

Admittedly, we could hear the remark *up until now we have done nothing* in quite negative terms,

but we could, and I believe we should, also hear Francis' statement in a positive light.

When we think of all that has been accomplished here in this place so far – and much has been accomplished – can we not say that it is true that *up until now we have nothing nothing?*

All that has been done so far has been God's work!

That's how it should be!

Yes, that is exactly how it should be in the Benedictine vision of things.

For St Benedict what matters is the *Opus Dei*: what God does, *the work of God*.

Yes, what really counts is *the work of God* in us, and not our work *for* God!

In the Rule Benedict is clear: *any good work we accomplish must be immediately attributed to God*. I suppose what I am really hearing when St Francis' words resonate in my heart is this: *we have done nothing*, but God has done much!

I believe that this is what we are called to recognise as we look back over the past ten years on this landmark date

With this memory of what God has already done comes a challenge for us: a challenge to start out afresh with Christ and to look forward in holy hope.

A Father of the Church (St Gregory of Nyssa) reminds us that Christian life goes *from new beginning to new beginning*, while St Benedict tells us that *we should open the ear of our heart to the divine voice calling out to us each and every day*.

*Oh that today we would listen to His voice!*

Yes, each new day is a new beginning.

Towards the end of last year – more precisely on the feast day of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the 21 November, 2013, I was reminded of the particular mission confided to us on our coming to Ireland. This reminder came to me through the words Pope Francis spoke at the monastery of the Camaldolese Benedictine nuns where he chose to close the *Year of Faith*. (I drew what the pope said that day to the monastic community's attention already during the past Advent season.)

What Pope Francis said made me think of the vision for Ireland shared with me by Abbot Paul Grammont who was a man of far-seeing eyes.

The pope's words to the Benedictine nuns on the Aventine Hill in Rome made me think of how not long before his passing from this world to be with God for eternity, Abbot Paul beckoned me to his bedside to say to me that one day Bec monks would come to Ireland with the mission to make live here the mystery of holy hope and that they would do this in a place where a living source flows. The land on which we stand – which is a place where a living source flows (there are many sources welling up from below the ground here) – was given to us for the Feast of Our Lady of Holy Hope. For me that was confirmation of our mission and the rightness of our being here, if confirmation was needed.

In his address at the Monastery of San Antonio Pope Francis reminded his listeners that monastics have a responsibility to keep the lamp of holy hope lit in their monasteries.

He invited us to ask ourselves if we were doing that.

He asked us if the flame of holy hope was burning brightly in our hearts.

Well, is it?

We might ask ourselves that question today.

As a community and as individual monks are we well and truly carrying the lamp of holy hope alight in our hearts?

This *house of prayer for all God's people* was born in and out of holy hope, a holy hope preceded by all that St Paul tells us always precedes hope: *suffering and trials, difficulties borne with patience and worked through by endurance*.  
Such is the earth in which true hope grows and from which it comes forth.

Holy Hope is a grace born out of a share in Christ's paschal mystery.

I would dare to say that Holy Hope is what emerges when our purely human hopes are dashed to the ground.

One thinks of the Emmaus pilgrims words: *Our own hopes had been*.

**Their** own hopes had to give way to a fresh *holy hope* (God-given hope), the hope transmitted by the One who went through suffering and death to enter into the new life of the resurrection and a share in God's glory

Let me return to St Francis' word for just another moment.

Let me say that there is another sense in which *we have not yet begun*.

What I am thinking of when I say that is this: *an immense task still awaits us!*

To quote Blessed John-Paul: *We have a great history still to be accomplished!*

St Francis' word calls upon us to look to the future, placing our hope and confidence in the One in whom we know we can trust.

It invites us to allow ourselves to be renewed by Christ, renewed in Christ, day after day as we seek to build up a fraternal community in this place: a fraternal community which offers a welcome to all those the Lord has sent, sends and will yet send our way.

What is absolutely vital for us to remember today is God's fidelity in our regard so far.

It is by recognising the Lord's fidelity in the past that we are given hope for the future ... and we are given even more than hope, we are given a certitude, the guarantee of great things still to come.

Again and again the Bible shows us that what strengthens and propels God's people to move forward in hope is their memory of God's goodness in the past.

When we look at what God has done in this place – as much despite us as assisted by us – we can hold a deep certainty in our hearts that He will not abandon or forsake us in the years ahead.

We can trust Him to continue to show us His love and to use us, not only in spite of but even with our weaknesses.

We can believe that He will manifest to His people, through our humble ministry, that they are all part of God's unique household, men and women who are welcome in this place, God's own *house of prayer for all His people*.

As we have seen, everything good accomplished in and through our lives has been, is and always will be *God's work*.

In whatever we accomplish we are only God's servants, instruments in His hands.

And yet, nonetheless, a responsibility befalls us.

Our responsibility is to realise that it is to the extent we make a gift of our lives to the Lord, allowing them to become a fragrant offering to Him, worshipping God *in spirit and in truth*, we contribute to the Church's growth in holiness and, by the same token, her growth in unity.

Yes, offering our lives selflessly, giving ourselves to God generously, in simple fidelity, we permit others to savour God's own sweetness and His great goodness in this place.

Through the exercise of whatever humble hospitality we offer here, it is the Lord Himself who welcomes all who come through the doors of this monastery and it is the Lord Himself whom we welcome in their coming to us.

Christ welcomes all-comers to His House of Prayer. He welcomes them as friends, helping them find joy and peace, consolation and renewed hope ... bringing them ever closer to Himself and gathering them increasingly to each other.

On this day as we give thanks to the Lord for the road already travelled, with the psalmist let us conclude by asking Him to continue the work of His hands in and through us.

Amen!