

**HOMILY MARKING
CELEBRATION OF COMPLETION OF WORKS
AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH, MONMOUTH, ST MICHAEL'S,
LLANARTH**

**2 MAY 2013
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All eyes were fixed on St. Paul's Cathedral two weeks ago for the funeral of Baroness Thatcher. Writing in *The Times*, Matthew Parris asked "Was it really a funeral? Was it a memorial? Was it a celebration? Or was it a stupendous social occasion?" Deep in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral is a memorial to another funeral, that of Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St. Paul's. There is a simple carving on the wall. It reads "If you want to see his monument, look around you".

As we come together to give thanks for the extraordinary achievement which is the renovation of St. Mary's Church and its sister at Llanarth, we can truly say "If you want to see a monument, look around you". A monument to what? To the fidelity of the people in this historic part of the country to "The Old Faith". A monument to the witness of the martyrs whose blood really is "the seedbed of the Church" as Tertullian wrote in the second century. The John Kembles, the David Lewis', the Philip Evans, the John Lloyds. I was privileged to be in St. Peter's, Rome, for the canonization of these and the others of the Forty

Martyrs of England and Wales in 1970. Their monument, their witness to the faith not carved in stone but written in blood. Like Thomas More before them they died “The King’s good servant, but God’s first”.

Memory is a key word in the Jewish faith and in the Christian religion too. Popular imagination thinks of memory fading further and further into the past as we try to trace our ancestors, remember the names, relive the stories and look at the faded photos. But the words of Jesus at the Last Supper do not evoke that kind of memory. He said: “Do this in Remembrance of me”. Remember. Put these words and these actions back together again. At the worst time of his life he did the best thing. That is one reason why, through our Baptism, we are called members, parts of the Body of Christ. And it is when we receive Him in Holy Communion, and are received by Him into Communion, that we are no longer separate people but parts of the one Body.

We who belong to the Church are not paid up members of a like minded club with similar tastes, background, intelligence, upbringing. Cardinal Newman struggled hard to make the huge journey from knowing intellectually that the Catholic Church was the fullest expression of Christ’s historic and apostolic teaching and presence to realizing that it was embodied in the parishes of Birmingham and London. Like so many people, he was driven to his knees in prayer realizing that there was nowhere else to go.

No wonder he wrote Lead Kindly Light. “I do not ask to see the distant scene . One step enough for me”.

The parishes of Monmouth and Llanarth have had to have a big vision and taken many steps, big and small, to bring this development to a successful conclusion. The fund raising record, and in record time, is an indication of many steps taken together. The cooperation between the parish and the Diocese, represented not just by myself tonight but by the Diocesan Trustee Mr. John Reddy who has also been a great source of wisdom and encouragement to me since I came. Your parish priest, Fr Nick James, the Parish Development Team and those who have donated in so many different ways. All to ensure that this heritage is preserved not just as a museum piece but as a living reality, a sign of the vibrant presence of Jesus Christ not just in its buildings but in its people. I was intrigued to read that one of the conditions attached to the building of this church in 1793 was that it had to be inconspicuous and discreet, concealed behind a row of houses. To add to that discretion, Catholics were required to arrive at the church one at a time. (That may still be the case today, but it is probably due to the parking restrictions!)

Cardinal Basil Hume used to say that God deserves nothing but the best from us. Harmony. Beauty. Dedication. Truth. Love. Service. That is the meaning of today’s gospel reading: The Cardinal also used to say that Cathedrals and churches are not just places in

which we worship God but with which we worship God. I recently sent Fr. Nick James a copy of my architectural talk at Westminster Cathedral called “O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness”. And that really says it all. It is the harmony of our lives that holiness is achieved. In that delicate balance of Body, Mind and Spirit which brings us to integrity, wholeness, holiness. None of us can do that on our own. We have to be open to the challenges and demands of every day living whilst at the same time always keeping in view the meaning and purpose of all things. “The person who can answer the question why can live with almost any how”.

We come together in these churches Sunday by Sunday to bring the picture of the holiness of God into focus in our own lives. In communion with each other, we catch a glimpse of the truth that the glory of God is humanity fully alive. In celebrating the Eucharist in memory of Jesus, we remember that he is indeed, The Way, The Truth and the Life.