



Homily for the Mass of Thanksgiving
For 60 years of Service of Michael Chute
4 May 2018
Holy Trinity Church, Brook Green

Archbishop George Stack

Is it pure coincidence I wonder, that this lovely celebration is taking place the feast of the Beatified Martyrs of England and Wales? The cynic might say that the 60 years Michael Chute has dedicated himself to the service of the altar here at Holy Trinity Brook Green could be described as a living martyrdom! The year 1958 marked the election of Pope John XXIII. 1965 saw the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council which he had summoned in 1959. The first translations of the Mass into the vernacular came in the same year and in 1970 the new English Missal was published. We are all familiar with the liturgical changes which flowed from it. In 1982 Pope John Paul II paid a pastoral visit to Great Britain. And in 2010 we celebrated the triumphant State visit of Pope Benedict XVI to this country.

Woven into that great tapestry of our Catholic history is the story of Holy Trinity church Brook Green, a great church designed by William Wardell and Joseph Hansom in 1866. This church has offered such distinguished service both to the important parish of Holy Trinity, and to the wider Diocese of Westminster. My memory goes back to Canon Heffernan and Canon Williams, to Mgr. Harry Turner, and Canon Eddie Matthews, Fr. Terry Tastard and now Fr. Richard Andrew.

Each one of them, and the many other priests who have worked here over the last sixty years, bringing their own faith and energy, their own insights and priorities to the ever-changing landscape in which we practice our faith.

Cardinal Basil Hume often used to say that churches are not just places in which we worship God but with which we worship God. That is one reason for the time, effort, money and expertise which goes into keeping these buildings alive for future generations. But they are built of living stones as well as great architecture. I often look around churches and think “If these walls could only speak. What would they say?”. They would speak of generations of people from every background and walk of life, and increasingly from every country under heaven, bringing their joys and hopes, their worries and their fears to this holy place. The poet T.S. Eliot once wrote about his church in the village of Little Gidding:

You are not here to verify

Instruct yourself, or carry report.

You are here to kneel,

Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more

Than an order of words, the conscious occupation

Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.

“Where prayer has been valid”. The essence of the Prayer of the Church, and the greatest prayer of all which is the Mass, is that it is

not just our own prayers, the private prayer of so many individuals, the prayer of petition directed in different ways. The Mass is the life giving prayer of Jesus himself, his sacrificial gift of himself, remembered, re-presented so that all of us are joined together in communion with him and with each other. "The Body of Christ". Amen. I believe that.

"The Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of the Church".

All the Sacraments and ceremonies that go with it are oriented towards it. The ritual and ceremony with which it is carried out brings to life, and joins together, the work of human hands. Joins us together with Jesus in heart and mind and conscience as we remember those words of St. Teresa of Avila:

"Christ has no body her on earth but yours. No hands but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look on the world".

Michael Chute has dedicated his life to these truths as he has served (such an important word) at the altar over these sixty years. Served generations of young people in deepening their understanding of faith as expressed in sign, symbol and sacrament. This is the language of the Church which goes beyond words, which goes deeper than words. I really do believe that the conduct and commitment of altar servers, the witness and the hope they give to the worshipping community is a treasure which cannot be measured. And they themselves grow into a deepening awareness of the mysteries they serve. *"Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat*

Juventutem meam” (trans. “I will go in unto the Altar of God. To God, Who giveth joy to my youth”).

The boy Samuel did not realise it was God calling to him when he was woken from sleep and ran to ask what the old priest wanted. God speaks to us in the silence of our hearts. Attentive silence and knowing when and how to listen and move and guide and direct are all part of the “actual participation” spoken of in our liturgical documents. *“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”*. Michael’s commitment to the formation of the young both on the parish level, Diocesan level and nationally is second to none. The witness of Stephen, the deacon and first martyr, is an example to all, young and old, as they learn the real lesson of *life* *“Regnare est cui Servire - To serve is to reign”*.

“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, my servant shall be also”. This church of Holy Trinity is a great symbol of *“the place where I am”* in the words of Jesus. It is in this place that Michael has found Jesus and served Him through his service at the altar and in so many other ways. I hope you will allow me to finish with the words of the great Welsh poet R.S. Thomas when he speaks of a church emptying on a Sunday night:

*Shadows advance
From their corners to take possession
Of places the light held for an hour.
The uneasiness of the pews
Ceases. There is no other sound
In the darkness but the sound of a man
Breathing, testing his faith
On emptiness, nailing his questions
One by one to an untenanted cross.*

Michael will have experienced the silence of this church settling down on a Sunday night after the divine drama which is the liturgy and the participation of the large congregations who worship in this church and love it, not least because of the quality of the liturgy. That has been made possible in part by the one for whom we give thanks tonight – Michael Chute, a good and faithful servant.
