



**Homily for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
Consecration of St. Mary's church, Bridgend**

**12<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**St. Mary's Catholic Church, Bridgend**

**Archbishop George Stack**

There are always problems when you decide to put up a major new building. Whether it is a school, community centre or a church, the issues are the same. Is it needed? How big should it be? Which site is best? How to choose an architect? And the ultimate question: How much will it cost and how will it be paid for?

These questions are not new. One thousand years before the time of Jesus we are told in the Old Testament of the Bible that King David wanted to build a Temple for the Lord. *“Here am I living in a house of cedar”* he said to the prophet Nathan, *“while the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent”*. Not everybody who thinks there should be a new building is the most suitable person to undertake the building of a Temple or a church. David certainly wasn’t. The Book of Chronicles tells us that God said to David *“You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my name, because you have shed too much blood on the earth in my sight”*. (1 Chronicles 22:8).

It was in the year 970 B.C. that David’s son Solomon was allowed to build the Temple. Why? Because on becoming king, God offered Solomon whatever he liked. Power and palaces. Riches and wealth. Armies and slaves. And Solomon’s answer rings down the ages. *“Give me wisdom and knowledge to go out and come before this people for*

*who can govern this people of yours that is so great?*". (2 Chronicles 1-7). The wisdom of Solomon is needed in building a new church, not least in inspiring and leading a parish in this great venture because *"who can govern this people of yours which is so great?"*. That was a task outstandingly fulfilled by Canon William Isaac over twenty years ago.

Everybody loves a party, don't we, especially at the opening of a new building or on the anniversary of the consecration of a church. I am sure there will be a lovely party in the hall afterwards. There was a party when the Temple was dedicated as well. We heard in tonight's Old Testament reading *"Now when the priests came out of the sanctuary, a cloud filled the sanctuary of the Temple of the Lord"* a bit like the incense tonight! *"And those who played the trumpet, or who sang, or who played musical instruments, gave praise to the Lord 'for he is good and his love is everlasting"*. (5 Chronicles:6-11)

Like all buildings and churches, the Temple of Solomon had a chequered history. It lasted about four hundred years until it was destroyed in 587 B.C. Israel had been invaded by the Babylonians. Today we would call them Iraqis. Jerusalem laid low. The Temple of Solomon destroyed. The people taken off into slavery again. *"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and there we wept, as we remembered Zion. How*

*could we sing the song of our fathers on an alien soil*". (Psalm 137:1. AKA Boney M).

Like the woman Jesus spoke to at the well of Samaria, the Jewish people had to learn in exile that whilst buildings were important, the really important thing was to worship God in the temple of your heart and of your life. That woman from Samaria knew all about rejection. She was part of a group of Jews who had compromised their religion and 'married out' as they say. They lived in what we now call the West Bank of the Jordan and worshipped on Mount Gerizim where, they believed, Abraham intended to sacrifice his son Isaac. There was conflict between them and the Jews who worshipped on Mount Zion – the Temple in Jerusalem. *"The time will come when you will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem but ... in spirit and in truth"* said Jesus.

Why this magical mystery tour of biblical history? Because at a celebration like this we give thanks to God for the building which is the church and the centre of a parish dedicated to the worship of God. But the building, beautiful though it is, is no substitute for the worship which takes place in the life of each individual and the relationship each one of us has with God. This is celebrated not just by so many individuals coming together accidentally on Sunday, but a group of people, bound together through faith and baptism who are

brought into communion with God and each other during Mass. The eucharist is God's embrace of each of us as individuals and as a community in order that we can keep alive the story of the presence of God in our midst. It is no accident that the members of the Church are called the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ in this time and in this place.

Lest I get carried away too much, let me just draw your attention to four things in the church that remind us of this truth. *"Christ is present when the word is proclaimed"* say the documents of the Church. The lectern and the reader and the honour we do to the word of God. *"Christ is present when the people are assembled"*. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all". And with your spirit.

*Christ is present in the person of the priest* who re-presents, represents the person of Christ and who says *"This is my body"*. The presidential chair is not any old chair but a very sacred one. And *Christ is present in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood*. The tabernacle. Surmounted by the pelican in her piety, that great symbol of the eucharist the mother feeding her chicks with her own blood. The pelican which is the symbolic design of this church as well.

When people come into this church, they always remark on the beautiful atmosphere. That comes not least because of the beauty of the architecture and the artefacts, the signs and the symbols all around us. But most of all, I think, it is because these walls have been soaked in the prayers of people who have worshipped here for the last twenty years, and those who have gone before them marked with the sign of faith. Whenever I come into a church I always think of the words of the great poet T.S. Eliot speaking of his own church in Little Gidding:

*“You are not here to verify,  
instruct yourself, or inform curiosity  
or carry report. You are here to kneel  
where prayer has been valid”.*

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