

Centenary of Westminster Cathedral

One of the great privileges of serving as Archbishop of Westminster is that of celebrating the Liturgy of the Church in the setting of the Cathedral itself. Slowly one comes to appreciate the majesty of the form of the Cathedral and the unique symmetry of the space thus dedicated to the worship of God.

This centenary celebration is, therefore, a moment of profound thanksgiving to God for the dedicated and hard work of so many people. Starting from the vision and determination of the Cathedral's founders, Cardinal Vaughan and Mr Francis Bentley its architect, the list becomes long and distinguished, too long to be spelt out here in any detail.

But in my mind and prayers are so many members of the clergy of the Diocese who have served the Cathedral, both its parish and its daily life, with dedication and, most often, cheerfulness. But I think, too, of so many generous volunteers and benefactors, many professional advisors and employees, who together sustain and develop the life of this great Cathedral. A very special place is, of course, held by the Westminster Cathedral Choir. Under a series of outstanding and innovative Masters of Music, the Choir achieves and sustains the highest standards of music, which enrich our Liturgy in a manner which is both remarkable and widely esteemed.

Often the Cathedral is at its best during the splendid and historic ceremonies and occasions which mark the last one hundred years.

Many people will have their own favourite moments. For me they include the Funeral Mass for Cardinal Hume, the visit of the relics of St Therese and, of course, my own Episcopal Ordination and Installation as Archbishop. But many, with longer memories than mine, will recall other events with equal delight and gratitude. At this time, we look forward to the forthcoming visit of Pope Benedict XVI to our Cathedral. His celebration of Mass here on the 18th September will be another remarkable and memorable moment.

Yet the Cathedral also yields the power and grace of God's presence to those who come during its moments of stillness and calm. Within the vast, enclosed space of its domes, it is not difficult to sense that presence and to be drawn into the mystery of God who

brings such comfort and strength to our souls. This is discovered by many especially when celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which forms such an important part of the life of the Cathedral and of the generous ministry of its chaplains.

We trust that Westminster Cathedral has a long and distinguished future ahead. Much is to be done to maintain the fabric of the Cathedral and to continue the work of enhancing it. On the occasion of this Centenary, we ask the blessing of Almighty God on this great enterprise, so that the Cathedral may continue to be a place of prayer and consolation for all who come to it.

+Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster