

ST PATRICK'S SOHO
Rededication and Blessing

Tuesday 31 May 2011

As we celebrate, this evening, the Feast of the Visitation of Our Blessed Lady to St Elizabeth, it is not difficult to call to mind images of their emotive meeting. Mary and Elizabeth greet each other: two pregnant women, both in difficult circumstances, both cherishing the life within them as a precious gift of God, Elizabeth proclaiming the divine nature of the child in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Visitation comes at the end of a long and arduous journey across mountains and barren lands throughout which Mary has carried the Light of the World. It gives rise to the great cry of recognition which springs up from the soul, and the womb of Elizabeth as she

sees before her the saving presence of the Lord.

Within these two aspects of the Visitation, the long journey and the cry of recognition, we can see something precious about the dynamic of the life of the Church. And not just of the Church in some general sense, but the Church as lived and expressed in every parish. I rejoice that at this moment of the restoration of St Patrick's Church this dynamic is clear for all to see.

Like Mary the Church is called to carry the Light of Christ across every landscape of time and place. Often that territory is harsh and unwelcoming. Sometimes it is fertile and verdant. No matter: the call of the Church is the same: to carry that Light, within her inner self, with quiet joy and contemplation, and to find ways of

letting that Light shine forth to all around.

The history of this parish tells that story. It is presented to us in the booklet prepared for these celebrations: a history of hardship and achievement, of heroic figures and hidden generosity, a history of great faith and trust in the Lord, in the goodness of love of His Sacred Heart, a history dedicated to and protected by St Patrick.

This parish continues to carry the Light of Christ. It is that Light which shines out so brightly in this newly and beautifully restored church: in the splendour of the floor, in the beauty of the sanctuary, in the loveliness of the new baptistery, to be blessed and dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of Life.

This Light is the same as that carried by Mary on her journey of Visitation. Everything comes to us from the Lord, present in the Eucharist in all His love. In the Blessed Sacrament He gives us His unceasing self-sacrificing love, to be our life and inspiration. In this parish, as in every parish, this great gift is welcomed and surrounded by loving reverence, by all the beauty we can muster, and by our loving response to those closest to His Sacred Heart: the forgotten, the needy and the lost.

Every landscape contains such people; every heart, including our own, knows such poverty. This is certainly the case, so evidently, in this part of our city. It has been so for a long time, and it will continue to be so in the future. But He is here. We seek to carry Him humbly on all of our byways, into all of our hideaways, so that His love may touch

and heal us all. This is our privilege, the privilege of every parish community and I thank God that it is such a powerful inspiration here in St Patrick's.

The Visitation of our Blessed Lady to St Elizabeth makes clear another part of our celebration this evening. As Elizabeth comes to see and greet Mary there arises in her a spontaneous cry of recognition: This is the Mother of my Lord; He is here; I am honoured; I must praise Him.

Is that not our reaction as we entered this church this evening? Its beauty evokes in us a similar cry of recognition: this is the house of the Lord; He is here; we are honoured; we must come to Him in praise and gladness. This is the fruit for which we give thanks this evening: that the

beauty of this church opens for every heart a pathway to the Lord. So often our contact with other people is filled with words: those of argument and persuasion, claims and counter-claims, as we try to fashion a way of living together. Yet, as many have commented, the testimony of beauty is the one which today most eloquently call us towards the Lord. This, I believe, is a project for every parish: to make of its church a beautiful sanctuary of the Lord so that the hearts of all who enter, by chance, in curiosity, in dismay or in gladness, may be raised towards Him and sense the gift of hope that faith alone can give. For the beauty of this church I give great thanks.

And tonight we affirm with joy that this cry of recognition is also evoked by the beauty of the life of prayer, by the sight

of a single person lost in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, by the evidence of young people prayerfully searching to understand and live their faith. The cry of recognition of the presence of the Lord is also heard when those who come to this country from afar, often in uncertain circumstances, find here a welcome and a home. This, they say, we recognise! This is the house of God and therefore our home too. The same will be said by those who receive from this place the warmth of practical help, of a hearing, of food, and of so much more in the new Community Centre.

These are the ways in which the mystery of the Visitation is lived again here in this parish, and, I pray, in every parish. We carry the living Lord of life in our world today. May our humble service evoke in others not a word of praise for us but a cry of recognition

that here is a sign, a simple yet convincing sign, that the Lord does indeed visit His people. This sign shows that everyone is invited to reach out from imprisoned hearts and, through His forgiving mercy and in the waters of baptism, meet the Lord, accept His embrace and live their lives to the full in Him

The light of Christ, which is so much the theme of its restoration, will continue to shine out in all these ways. This is an inspiration to us all. The commitment of this parish to the true dignity of human life from conception to natural death is an unerring consequence of the Eucharistic centre of its prayer. May the great men and women who have played their part in the story of St Patrick's continue to pray for us. May the saints on whom we make a special claim, especially St

Patrick and St Claude de la Colombiere, and those to be honoured in the new stained glass windows: St Therese of Lisieux, St Francis of Assisi, St Damien of Molokai, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and the Servant of God Mother Magdalen Taylor intercede for us before the Lord. I am sure that, with all the saints, they rejoice at this moment, in thankful praise to the Lord for all His graces. So let our voices be one with theirs, one with the voice of Mary our Blessed Mother, in her song of thankfulness. In her ‘Magnificat’ she committed herself and her entire future into the hands of the Lord. We do the same, using her words as our own: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour. Holy is His name and His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.’ Amen