

New Brighton, Sunday 21st May 2023

Anniversary of the Dedication of Shrewsbury Cathedral

Sunday within the Octave of Ascension

*Terribilis est.*¹

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

This place is terrible. Strange are the words which opened our prayer this morning, as we are celebrating the anniversary of the dedication of the mother-church of our diocese. Why should we qualify with terrible a place where we gather every week to give our public prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord?

Is a church a place to be afraid of? Not at all, of course! This place is a shelter for all, a refuge for the poor sinners and a happy place for the faithful sheep, seeking for a Home in the middle of so many dangers outside in the world. This church is a safe place, designated for the gathering of the people to celebrate their praise to their Creator and Redeemer.

Such places are said terrible not to frightened us, but to remind us of what kind of action is performed in them. This is not a normal building: it is the temple of God, His House, where He comes and gives Himself as an oblation to his Father for the redemption of our sins. A miracle is happening in this place each time the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered.

Because of the dignity of the action performed into such building, it was in need to be separated from any other kind of building, and consecrated for one single purpose: praise the glory and mercy of the Lord.

This place is said terrible, because of the holy fear such events should provoke in our soul. This is not ordinary action. This is not ordinary building. But the word terrible might be confusing for our modern minds, as it implies the fear of a danger we would need to escape.

Instead of this fear of the servant, let's read that word terrible with the fear of the sons of God, fear which allow us say to God with an immense and due respect: Abba, Father.²

St Thomas Aquinas, the common doctor, explained so well the real fear we ought to have today:

“We are speaking of fear now, in so far as it makes us turn, so to speak, to God or away from Him. For, since the object of fear is an evil, sometimes, on account of the evils he fears, man withdraws from God, and this is called human fear; while sometimes, on account of the evils he fears, he turns to God and adheres to Him. [...]

¹ Gen., XXVIII, 17. Mass of the dedication, Introit.

² Rm., VIII, 15.

Accordingly, if a man turns to God and adhere to Him, through fear of punishment, it will be servile fear; but if it be on account of fear of committing a fault, it will be filial fear, for it becomes a child to fear offending its father.”³

We are invited to practice this filial fear. Fear to be separated from God because he loves us and we love Him, and we never want to be separated by our own fault from Him.

Therefore, the place which is His House must attract us with the filial fear, as it is the place we can meet face to face the person we love with all our heart, mind, and soul. We are afraid to lose the opportunity to meet him, to soil this place with misconduct, inappropriate talking or behaviour.

This fear just about a place is necessary for us to understand something more about ourselves. If we ought to have such care for the sacred space of a building dedicated to God, how much more care should we have for our soul, created at the image of God, and consecrated to Him by the Sacrament of Baptism?

Our soul was and is the intimate place where such mysteries happen! Through the grace, we were made children of God, temple of the Holy Ghost. It no longer belongs entirely to us, but to God: we are His children, chosen by Him.

However, we remain entirely free to continuously and positively answer to the love, care and grace He would like to give us.

A building shall pass with the age of this world. Our soul will remain immortal forever. The respect for this building and the Holy Person we meet there, is a token for the sacred care of our soul, Temple of God.

We are the living stones of one and only living temple, the Holy Church. This temple of God, made of real stones and consecrated to Him, is only a figure for ourselves, real persons, created at His Image, consecrated to Him, and called to participate to His Divine Life.

“This symbol is real because, like the church and the altar which are first washed, then anointed with holy oil, and which welcome Jesus-Christ in the Sacred Host, each Christian is washed in the waters of Baptism, anointed with the chrism of Confirmation and receives the Eucharist in his heart. Finally, the material temple is the symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem where the songs of joy of the elect resound continually. One day, the glorified Church will enter the true sanctuary of God, which is heaven, for ever.”⁴

“O God, Who from living and chosen stones prepare an eternal dwelling place for Your Majesty, help Your people who call upon You, so that whatever benefits come to Your Church materially may be even greater through its spiritual extension.”⁵

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

³ St Thomas Aquinas, *Ila Ilae*, Q. 19, art. 2, concl.

⁴ Dom Gaspar Lefevre, *Missal for the Faithful*. Translated with www.deepl.com

⁵ Roman Missal, Mass of the Dedication, Postcommunion.