

St Anne's Cathedral

SOLEMN VESPERS

Sunday 12 November 2006

7.00 pm

My dear friends

It is good for us to be here. For more than a year we have, as it were, been in exile, and now we have come home again. The different blessings have reminded us of our roots and our obligations. So we have witnessed the blessing of the font in which new members of the Church will be buried in baptism and rise to a new life. There has been a special blessing for the confessionals where so many will be born again through repentance and absolution. The centre of the diocese under Christ is the bishop, so his chair, the *cathedra*, has likewise been blessed. But very specially this evening we focus on our patron.

So among our first tasks in this beautifully restored Cathedral is to acknowledge its dedication to St Anne, the mother of Mary. While we know next to nothing about St Anne, what we do know is both simple and significant. Like everyone Mary had a mother, and we know her as Anne. It is this mother whom we venerate now and to whom this Cathedral church is dedicated. Shadowy she may be, but real she certainly is and a wonderful patron for us to have.

It came as a surprise to me to learn that Anne is the patron saint of wood carvers. But there is a simple symbolism in such a dedication. Anne is the root of the tree whose flower was Mary and whose fruit was Jesus. This is a lovely image by way of which we may begin to discern through the shadows the true person. Faith has been well described as the “agent of things un hoped for” and certainly this describes her own faith. She was the agent through whom the mother of Jesus was born — she was rooted in faith and fruitful in love.

Presumably she knew her grandson Jesus who was Mary's son (Mary was probably only a teenager when she gave birth to her son). And like every grandmother Anne would have been (as we have just heard the choir sing) “joyful in the Lord”, her heart would surely have been

singing for joy.

We have been reminded that Jesus is the living stone of God's house, the cornerstone. As such he is a challenge for all God's children. For believers, while what he demands is hard and the way he beckons is often difficult, he is someone to trust utterly and unreservedly. For those who do not yet believe he is a sign of contradiction, a confrontation and perhaps a stumbling block, but at the same time someone who simply cannot be ignored. In whatever way we may be challenged by him—who unlike Anne is anything but a shadowy figure—it is good to know that this is one place where we may always find him.

Let's remind ourselves what our Cathedral is. Like every church this first of all is the House of God, where God specially dwells. As such it should be for everyone a sign of God's presence among us. It is also an invitation to us to come and see. It is a place where we may seek forgiveness and peace. It is somewhere where all may feel welcomed and at home.

Moreover it is the centre and focus of the Diocese of Leeds, which stretches from Ripon, to Goole, to Uppermill, to High Bentham, and which is home to some 2 million or more people, of whom about 150,000 are Catholics. It is a focus of unity and as such must also be a sign of hope for all.

Let us remember that, as St Peter has reminded us, we have been called out of darkness into the light that is Christ, and that we may be "joyful in the Lord".

So this evening our predominant emotions may be *gratitude*, not least for those who have so generously contributed to the cost of all that has been done here; and after gratitude, *joy* at the beauty of God's house; and along with joy, a proper *pride* at the way in which our Cathedral provides a focus for God's presence in the City; and finally it seems to me that this Cathedral Church should be a sign for all of *hope* for the future. Gratitude, joy, pride and hope—these must be the feelings of every mother as she looks to the future through the eyes of her child, and would surely have been what Anne herself felt at the birth of her grandson Jesus.

+David Konstant
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