

25th Sunday (B)

23rd September 2018

‘Consecration of our Church’

1 Kings 8: *Let Your eyes watch over this house.*

Ps 83: *How lovely is Your dwelling place, Lord God of Hosts!*

Heb 12: *You have come to Mt Zion and the city of the living God.*

Jn 2: 13–22: *He was speaking of the sanctuary that was His body.*

You’ll have seen, hopefully, as you arrived for Mass today, the 12 consecration candles lit around the walls of the church. These candles — which I only light for the feast of our patron St Augustine, and for this day, 23rd September — mark the 12 places where the church’s fabric was ‘anointed’ ... literally anointed with the holy oil of Chrism on the day of its dedication or consecration, 23rd September 1971. Every anniversary of that consecration day is a solemn feastday here in our church, though it only occasionally falls on a Sunday. It’s why we have not only the candles lit, but also special readings for this Sunday.

These readings focus on the idea that the Lord always chooses a place to make His name known to His people, a holy place where His name can be worshipped and adored: a sacred space where God comes to meet us. This was — for the Jews of Jesus’s day, and for 1000yrs previously — the Temple in Jerusalem, for which Jesus has such “zeal,” as we heard. For us, we are not bound to one particular place, such as Jerusalem: we have the centre of our faith in each and every place where the

Mass is offered and the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. Mass offered in this church, or in St Peter’s basilica, or in a small wooden hut on a poor mission station, is all the same: the Lord makes Himself present, and His people are blessed, fed, and enjoy the graces of His sacrifice.

I would say that two things arise from the celebration of our Anniversary of the Church’s consecration. First, is how we treat our own church — the reverence we accord this holy place around the altar of the Lord. And the second thing is that we should remember in our prayers on this day those whose contributions have helped build up this church.

We heard there in the Gospel how Our Lord was upset by the trading, money-changing and animal selling going on in the Temple precincts, and cleansed the Temple by His actions of driving them all out. It was a Messianic action, the action of a prophet, restoring to its rightful use the house of God. “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples,” Jesus reminds them, in one of the other Gospel accounts of this incident. We know that the animals for sacrifice, and the shekels for the Temple tax, were standard parts of the Jewish worship and ritual, but

clearly Jesus sees that there are higher priorities. The most important thing for His Father's house is that it should be a place of prayer. This should be our point of reference, too, for our own church. Above all, it should be a place of reverent prayer: in the quiet times in the week, when no service is taking place and people can pop in for private prayer (and it's important to me that we do keep the church open in this way); and also, it should be reverent and prayerful when we gather together for Sunday Mass, the highpoint of our prayer of the week, to offer the saving sacrifice of Jesus on His holy altar ... Our traditional actions, such as arriving in good time for Mass, blessing ourselves with the holy water at the door, genuflecting before we take a place in the pews, kneeling or sitting for a quiet time of prayer before Mass begins — these all speak volumes about the consideration we have for the Lord who is present here at the heart of our church. We respect the church in honour of the Lord whose house it is, and we converse with Him as the priority in this place that has been consecrated to His name.

It's also important to acknowledge on this day that many have given time, money, and a great many other contributions to build up this parish and church. Let's not forget that for 30yrs, before we had this church, from about 1932 to 1962, parishioners had to convert school rooms at St Augustine's school every single weekend into a usable chapel for the Sunday Masses. Every weekend for 30yrs! That's quite a task, isn't it? — imagine it! So, we are immensely grateful to those who in the late 1950s, and through the 1960s worked with Fr Longstaff to fund and pay off the building of this parish church. We pray for those benefactors, and all benefactors since, right up to our own day, who have made it possible to have a blessed and worthy place for the celebration of Mass. Let's be their successors in loving and caring for our church, our parish, our people. To the honour of God's name, let's work hard in this church to be the place of welcome, and prayer, that Our Lord Jesus would want us to be, in continuity with all those who have gone before us, and lived the Gospel here at St Augustine's.