

LIVING WATER

I remember as a child my father buying a new car and taking us out for a spin. It was just before the 70 mph speed limit came in – that'll help you date me – and we did 112, the engine screaming so loudly we thought it was going to explode. Ever after, when in from work, he'd often take us out for a ride. I can't say ours was a very religious family, but on those trips my father taught me two habits that have lasted a lifetime. One was to make the Sign of the Cross when passing a Catholic church, to honour the Real Presence of Jesus in the Tabernacle. I hope this doesn't sound too pious or old-fashioned but I do think it's a sound practice, one well worth teaching our children. The other was on the way back in the car he'd often swing by church so we could say a prayer. This too became for me a lifelong habit. As a teenager on my bike, I'd often drop into church to pay a visit. Opening the door to enter, seeing the statues, the votive candles and the sanctuary lamp flickering in the dark, you sensed you were crossing a threshold and entering the Other World.

WHEREVER THE WATER FLOWS IT BRINGS HEALTH, AND LIFE TEEMS. In that 1stR, Ezekiel visualises a new Temple, whose Liturgy, symbolised in the cleansing waters flowing east down to the Arabah, brings life, healing, health and happiness. This prophecy came true in Jesus Christ from whose Heart flows rivers of living water, the Holy Spirit: as Jesus said IF ANYONE IS THIRSTY, LET HIM COME TO ME. In today's Gospel, we hear of the inauguration of this new Liturgy when Christ's side was pierced by the soldier's lance. For it's from the Cross that the Church's liturgy flows: the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist, which bring new life) the sacraments of healing and liberation (reconciliation and anointing) and the sacraments of service (marriage and Holy Order). These seven channels, flowing with grace, are for us the portals of heaven and eternal happiness. They bring us from Calvary the living water of the Holy Spirit, the salvation Christ won for us, and the union we long for with the Father who made us. And all of this happens here, in the church building.

I'd like to express our profound thanks to Fr. Bill, the contractors, the diocese, and all the parishioners for the magnificent work done to this church, dedicated to Our Lady Immaculate, Patron of our diocese. This church, this Temple of God's Presence, this oasis of peace on a busy high street, is now truly a place of beauty, appropriate to the celebration of the sacred mysteries. Indeed, in a few moments, we will bless the new baptismal font. I've never blessed a font before: it comes from being a new bishop! But it's a wonderful thing to do, rich in meaning and significance. -Because it's through the waters of the font that the gift of salvation flows. For baptism is the gateway, the threshold of discipleship, the sacramental door through which we enter the Other World. So today, my prayer is that this refurbished church will be a truly effective tool of new evangelisation: that it will attract people to visit it, that visiting it, they will say a prayer, that in praying, they will meet Jesus Christ, that in meeting Christ, they will be transformed to seek baptism, and that through baptism they will come to love Christ, present and active in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Indeed, assisted by the prayers of Our Lady Immaculate, may we all find in this holy place that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which our hearts long.