

### CENTENARY

THIS IS A HOLY PLACE, THE HOUSE OF GOD AND GATE OF HEAVEN. Today we celebrate the centenary of this church dedicated to Joseph, the Guardian of Jesus and Husband of Mary. Anniversaries are times to look back and give thanks. We thank God today for all we've received in this place: the baptisms, confirmations and First HCs, the marriages and funerals, the parish priests and parishioners we've known and loved. Aldershot itself has changed hugely from the garrison town Fr. Purcell knew in the 1860s when the mission began, to today's urban area with its two churches under Fr. Whelan. But St. Joseph's, whose anniversary we celebrate, has been for this town, truly a holy place, the house of God and gate of heaven. For just as Joseph himself was the husband of Mary, so too this church has been a home for the Catholic family of Aldershot and for many others besides. And just as St. Joseph was the Guardian of Jesus, so too this church has been the dwelling-place of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, a place of Real Presence from which he has offered to all the Gospel and the gift of eternal life.

But a centenary is not just an occasion to look back. During Eastertime, we hear at Mass extracts from the Apocalypse, the last book of the NT, St. John's vision of the End-time. I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH he says. I SAW THE HOLY CITY AND THE NEW JERUSALEM. When I was a parish priest, we often had this reading at funerals, as it is full of hope that the loved-one we mourn is now safe with God in heaven. HE WILL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES. THERE WILL BE NO MORE DEATH, MOURNING OR SADNESS. THE WORLD OF THE PAST HAS GONE. Jesus by dying has made a way for us through death, and by rising has opened the gates of heaven. This gift of eternal life, he offers to everyone on earth, if only they could hear it and receive it. In Portsmouth, one of the things I like doing in the evening is going out for a walk to say the Rosary. I like the changing scene, but the lights of the city are so bright, you can rarely see the stars. Our secular culture is a bit like that: so busy, so bright, so absorbing; it easily blocks out God and the sacred canopy of the angels and saints, like fog obscuring our eternal destiny and making us forget it. This is why it's good to read the Apocalypse; it reminds us of the life of the world to come, and it fills us with joy as we look forward to the glory Christ calls us to.

YOU SEE THIS CITY? HERE GOD LIVES AMONG US. Today, we gather in St. Joseph's to celebrate its centenary as a holy place in Aldershot, the house of God and gate of Heaven. An anniversary is not just a time to look back but a time to look forward. We know there is much work to be done to bring this building up to standard and to secure it for the next 100 years. And I hope and pray over the coming months, the parish with the help of the diocese, can renew this property so that the mission of the Church can flourish here. A parish of course is really its people, its living stones, its community, and its plant serves them. So in this Mass, in which we thank God and pray for the holy family we've known and loved here, living and dead, let's also pray for all who belong to this community now, for our parish school, and for the next generations. May God bless us with many vocations and may He fill us all with new zeal, remembering too our fellow Christians and all people of good will. Indeed, through this holy place, the House of God, may everyone in Aldershot come to know, love and serve Jesus Christ and thus one day pass through the Gates of Heaven to eternal happiness.