



August 2024

Dear friends and colleagues,

St Augustine's church, a building which has stood for 151 years on the spot where Methodists originally worshipped in the open air, was recently consecrated for the ACC by our Bishop. Church *and* Christian, all are consecrated and remade in Christ. He is our true church, and so our cathedral church speaks of Him. Fire, oil and incense recall ancient sacrifices that foreshadowed

Christ, and at the start of the service a copy of the mortgage deed was consumed by fire and we anointed our church with water and sacred chrism in the same way Christians are initiated; we traced crosses on the walls to recall the crucifixion by which all ancient rites are superseded, and the crosses were censed.



After all the ceremonies and symbolism, it is obvious St Augustine's is no mere museum for sacred objects, the altar no mere table for a symbolical meal. It is the place to praise, bless and preach; to offer, intercede and give thanks; to sing, bow and kneel; to honour, consecrate and commune; to baptise, absolve and commission. In it the most extraordinary things occur: babies are changed into children of the Church of God; bread and wine into Christ's body and blood; laymen into deacons and priests; sinners into saints. Such exceptional events deserve an exceptional place.

Of course, the People of God are more truly the Church than are the chapels they build; the community that meets there is far more than the building. God built his Church on Jesus, not on a concrete slab, and Jesus commissioned Peter to continue building. St Augustine, the cathedral church's patron, travelled here from Rome to begin his evangelisation in this nation. We, in turn, sent missionaries to the world for centuries to come, and still do. There is much good happening in this Diocese, including leadership and sound teaching, worship and devotions, ministries and study groups. But we are also aware that there is so much more to do, and the task seems very daunting. The Church today needs new St Augustines for our time, bringing the Gospel to this land with fresh enthusiasm. And it needs us all to think how we, as living stones of the Church of Christ, welcome and support each other as Christians and open our arms wide to the world.

We have to let *ourselves* be reconsecrated too, not just our cathedral church. Hear the words and absorb the ritual. As we are immersed in the worship and the communities of the parishes and missions of this little Diocese, may we rededicate our lives. As we witnessed natural materials of bricks, mortar, timber and stone become a consecrated supernatural place, let God renew us as a temple of the Holy Spirit. May the sacred rites we recently witnessed instruct our minds and hearts and senses, for we also are dedicated for divine service, that our very lives may be liturgies too!

With every blessing

Fr. Raymond Thompson

Archdeacon

Deo gratias (65 years, and onward we go!)

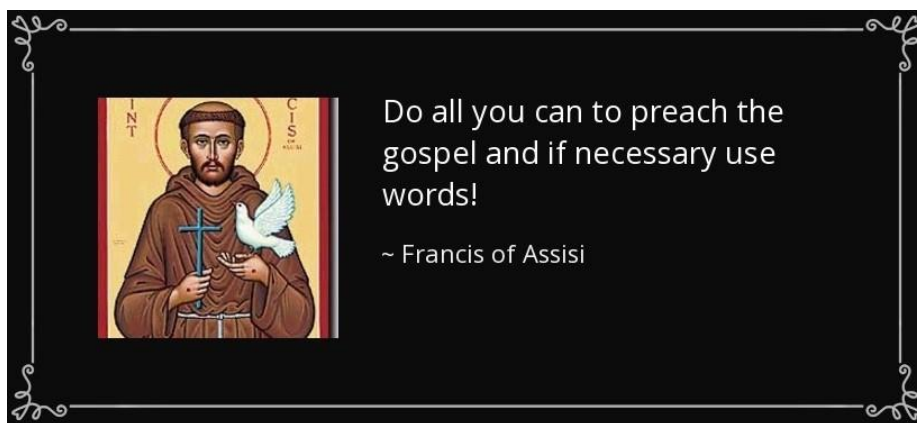
A time for me to very briefly reflect and give thanks. In September 1959, just after my 12th birthday, my vicar asked me if I wouldn't mind helping out the elderly lady who took the infants' afternoon Sunday School class in the parish hall. I began by playing the piano for the songs which the little ones sang, and soon progressed to telling the Bible stories and explaining them. It wasn't long before "Auntie Flo", as she was known to most of us, was happy to just sit in the corner and let me get on with it. So began the journey of ministry for which, 65 years later, I feel enormously grateful and humbled. This was unlicensed in the formal sense, but was my regular routine for almost ten years until June 1969 when I had trained and was admitted and licensed as a Layreader. My Sunday School days came to an end then, but I have such fond memories of them, and of the little ones who sat and listened with wonder to the stories from the Bible and to the explanations of God's work in nature and the world. It is somewhat sobering to realise that the little children from those days of long ago, who were aged between three and six, are now pensioners, some over 70!

I had joined our most excellent choir after passing an audition early in 1957 (and I have to admit to being one of those choirboys who did get into trouble for playing pranks on the organist and choir master). Dear old Mr Chaney had been in post since 1908 (finally retiring in 1971), and had seen his best days, but goodness me he knew his stuff! He was renowned in organist circles regionally, and at the outbreak of the Second World War he reluctantly had to admit lady contraltos to the choir because male call-up deprived him of his altos. He had presided over a choir which could have rivalled that of the cathedral and sang Evensong on Wednesdays as well as Sundays. In my teenage years the church was full on Sunday evenings for Evensong. When my voice broke I moved to the tenors, and had also been serving at the early 8am Sunday Eucharist and on weekdays.

On the day of my confirmation in May 1960 I was appointed assistant to the sacristan, whom I soon succeeded in that post due to her eyesight problems. It must have been apparent that I had a fascination and a deep love and appreciation for all things to do with order, liturgy, vestments, altar frontals, sanctuary lamps, and all the things we regard as "sacramentals" which play such an important part in beautifying, enhancing and enabling our worship.

For more than 30 years I was a Layreader (these days called Readers) until I finally left the Church of England in 1999 over its rejection of orthodox doctrine and its decision that it could alter the nature of the sacraments, and soon joined the Anglican Catholic Church which has been my joyful spiritual home ever since. I have been immensely privileged to have served as a priest within this Church and to have ministered to so many wonderful people, and to have enjoyed the friendship, wisdom, spiritual insight and counsel of Bishop Damien and some marvellous colleagues.

I reject the notion that such anniversaries are times for congratulations, for we are given the ability to do what we are called to do by Him who calls us, but I truly give thanks for everyone who has been part of my ministry journey over these past 65 years, from the children I first taught to the present day.



(My "desk picture" on the front page shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, or from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)