

Pusey House 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass  
11<sup>th</sup> October 2024

“My house shall be called the house of prayer”

It is a real joy to be here today and to share in these 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

This “*home of sacred learning and a rallying point of the Christian faith*” has been deeply formative for countless members of the University, and of the Church of England more widely. As a formerly young(er) man subject to “*the caprice of ever-changeful fashion*” I joined the ranks of those “*successive years*” in 1994 shortly after matriculating.

My tutorial partner and I found our way into what is now the Ursell Room, where we encountered the priest librarian. He looked up and welcomed us with an expression of *spiritual counsel and comfort* that characterised the House in those days – “get out!” My tutorial partner had a goatee beard.

Well, I didn’t get out but persevered and came to find in this place not only friendships that have endured across the decades, but a compelling and converting expression of the Catholic Faith rooted in the habits and disciplines of holiness: awe-filled worship, daily prayer, sacramental life and study. Indeed, it was here that I made my first confession and came to explore that union of mind and worship that leads to ever deeper repentance and conversion of life. As an undergraduate, day by day (mostly) and Sunday by Sunday I was compelled by the beauty, conviction and dedication of the worship offered here, as I was drawn into, immersed in, the very mystery of God. *How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

And it is heavenward that the founders of this *house of sacred learning*, consecrated to the greater glory of God, to promote theological study, holiness of life, spiritual counsel and comfort, wanted to direct us.

Within the providence of God, the 9<sup>th</sup> October, the day this House was opened as a memorial to Edward Pusey, is now, in the Universal Calendar, the Feast of St John Henry Newman. Reflecting on a sermon preached by St John Henry Newman entitled Holiness Necessary for Future Blessedness, I was profoundly struck by these words which have a particular resonance for our celebrations today:

*“Heaven then is not like this world; I will say what it is much more like, - a church. For in a place of public worship no language of this world is heard; there are no schemes brought forward for temporal objects, great or small; no information how to strengthen our worldly interests, extend our influence, or establish our credit. These things indeed may be right in their way, so that we do not set our hearts upon them; still (I repeat), it is certain that we hear nothing of them in church. Here we hear solely and entirely of God. We praise Him, worship Him, sing to Him, thank Him, confess to Him, give ourselves up to Him, and ask His blessing. And therefore, a church is like heaven; because both in one and the other, there is one single sovereign subject – religion – brought before us.”*

The *single sovereign subject of religion* gets a bad press in contemporary western culture. Both the Church and wider society are going through a time of particular change. We have no right to live in uninteresting times.

But, our Founders have set before us, in the very architecture of this chapel and House, the demands of holiness of life, inviting us to inhabit the courts of heaven *(to) hear solely and entirely of God - praise Him, worship Him, sing to Him, thank Him, confess to Him, give ourselves up to Him, and ask His blessing*. They knew, in their own time, the urgency of this and we do too. Reflecting on the religious scene in our day, a former Bishop of London points us to Andrew Brown's observation *that one of the symptoms of extreme hypothermia is the urge to remove all one's clothes even in a blizzard. Panic is a faithless and fruitless response to the challenge we face*.

So, the challenge, for Church and society, is to not panic. Sometimes, panic can be the result of a lack of perspective and depth of understanding. If we are to be 're-clothed in a rightful mind' then attending to the disciplines of prayer and the beauty of worship, the goodness of God in his gifts of creation and the pursuit of truth must be an imperative as we seek to *live into who we are in Christ, and to be transformed, not for ourselves, but for one another (Fr Westhaver)*

We are called to remain steadfast and faithful as the Holy Spirit reshapes us and conforms us ever more closely to the likeness of Christ, filled with grace and truth. After all, the seed of the Church is not a strategic development plan or a restructuring narrative: it is the blood of the martyrs.

Thank God, very few in this part of the world are called to the red martyrdom of shedding their blood for Christ. All of us, though, are called to the white martyrdom of fidelity. Endurance in prayer and utter givenness, lives offered completely in love and service to Christ, who has *loved us to the end*, are faithful and fruitful responses to the many challenges that we face.

It is no accident that from the renaissance of the Oxford Movement emerged a renewal of the Religious Life in the Church of England; lives offered completely in love and service to Christ.

Of course, it was to Pusey that Marian Hughes made her vows in 1841 as the first professed Religious in the Church of England since the Reformation.

Just eight years after this House opened, the Community of the Resurrection was founded in the Chapel of the Resurrection, by Charles Gore, first principal, on St James Day (1892). The religious vocation - magnifying our common baptismal life - to radical holiness and evangelism through the common life of prayer, study and service to the poor, has renewed the Church over the generations – endurance in prayer and lives poured out in love of him who pours out his life for us.

The One who has called and consecrated his people has done so, primarily, to sing his praises, *Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*

This is why, above all else, we must insist upon the primacy of prayer and worship: *My house shall be called the house of prayer*. In our liturgical round - the life of prayer, animated by the Spirit, the Comforter - we are formed as God works *His* purposes out. We love the Liturgy because it is a gift of grace through which we are caught up into eternity, earth is taken up into heaven, and we and all creation are returned to our rightful place – with God. We are strengthened, confirmed, in the Faith.

All else flows from and through this gift of communion with God and all creation, as the Lord continues his work of sanctification, bringing those who have not received mercy to mercy, calling this world out from darkness to light.

Pusey House also commends to the wider Church the imperative of sacred learning and theological study. The Scriptorium is a gift and encouragement to the wider Church that must delight the Founders.

In a Church that speaks of being simpler we would do well to remember that there is a difference between simplicity and ignorance. St Jerome notes that, *“Holy Simplicity is good, but holy knowledge is better.”*

Knowledge is not an enemy to be fought against in the search for God. Holy Knowledge, knowledge of God, is not true knowledge if it does not bring us into union with God. Faithfulness will be nourished and fortified by a love for learning which deepens the desire for God and makes Him manifest.

We do this, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, as we work at the life-long task of metanoia, repentance.

We must begin with our own need for conversion of life, hearing afresh the Word of God, and deepening our relationship with Jesus. We are living in a society which is moving away from the habit of a communal faith framed by a broadly Christian social context, towards a faith which – where it persists, and it does - is fragmented, self-conscious and more individually lived. This provides us with a moment to explicitly propose and commend the Good News in all its breadth and richness.

Archbishop David Hope, preaching here on Ascension Day twenty years ago, encouraged the faithful, *“So what might be the mission entrusted to the Church in this twenty-first century? In one sense it is none other than that which was entrusted to the first disciples – Go out into all the world..proclaim the Kingdom..make disciples. The culture may have changed; the Church itself has changed – the message remains the same. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and for ever. So the task of the Church – above all – is to remain faithful to the Lord who has called us and in baptism incorporated us into membership of his body the Church – the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.”*

The vocation of Pusey house is not to sentimental antiquarianism, it is to set forth a vision of God transmitted through the praying and worshipping life of the Church. In the pursuit of holy knowledge we are seeking to acquire nothing less than the mind of Christ. With courageous fidelity, immersed in Sacred Scripture, sacramental grace, above all a Eucharistic life, we are to speak from within the Church and for the Church.

Neville Figgis, writing in his *Hopes for the English Religion*, observes that the universal character of the English Church - *the Church of the land as representative of the whole body, one element in the great society* - is to be found in *“the sense that the church has the power of an endless life, that she gathers up all the ages, and that she is the church of the future, because she is the church of the past, that she is rather a living spirit than a dead tradition.”*

If we are not to be obstacles to the world's seeing the beauty of God in the Church, we must, in simplicity and humility, depend upon (biretta tip to Fr Westhaver) the effulgence of God's grace.

The community of saints that is Pusey House, imperfect earthen vessels containing a glory that is not our own but of God, rejoices today and are thankful for the unfailing mercy and goodness received across the last 140 years . Keeping our eyes fixed on the horizons which God is opening before us they will, without doubt, surpass all that we ourselves will foresee or plan.

“to the only God, immortal, invisible, be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.”