

2019 Dedication of the Abbey Church

1. **It is 40 years since we started building this church** and even now we have not finished it. For the Jerusalem Temple it was 46 years. The focus of the Jews was limited to the construction of the building. The Christian focus is the construction of a spiritual edifice not made with human hands: “the Temple of his Body,” **our Eucharistic experience of his Body. Becoming a Church is not about our work for God but God’s work in us.**

2. **Jesus speaks of the “Temple of his Body” within a very specific context**, namely the purification of the Jerusalem Temple: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.” (Jn 2:19) **Jesus links his death and resurrection with the purification of the Jerusalem Temple.** The buying and selling of oxen, sheep and pigeons has a this-worldly downward movement and preoccupation. The death and resurrection of Jesus lifts us upwards, in worship of **the Father who raises Jesus’ broken body from death to the right hand of his glory in heaven.**

3. **Therefore does Jesus contrast the this-worldly stock exchange like trade to a house where all eyes and bodies are traded over**, handed over to the Father in adoration. The Evangelist is telling us that true worship of the Father lies not in the building of wood and stone and in the buying and selling of goods and services, **but in the Body of the Risen Lord glorifying the Father.**

4. **Thus all the symbols of a Christian or Catholic edifice should point to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.** We like to use the phrase *lex credendi, lex aedificandi* when speaking of sacred architecture. That is to say, the law of believing is the law of building a Church. But today’s feast suggests we reverse the saying: **the law of building is the law of believing.** Today you should take a moment to stand at the end of the aisle in the nave and look down the center of the church. The columns of the sanctuary rear up and then rush down to the altar. Above the altar is the crucifix. Between the floor of the church and the dome is a procession of saints rushing towards a finish line that ends each side of the wooden lattice hiding the stairs. On the left side is going to be the bas-relief of the resurrection which Fr. Dunstan is finishing up in his studio. On the right side is the death and burial of Jesus. **The attentive visitor is given a view of the Temple of his Body in movement of stone and glass.**

5. **Yet we cannot stop there if we wish to apply or assimilate today’s celebration to ourselves personally and any of the four communities** on this hill which use the abbey church. The language of a sacred building should point to a language of living or the witness of a people who are each aware that God is building them up: *lingua aedificandi, lingua vivendi.*

6. **What does this mean concretely, practically?** It means that as individuals and as a community, people outside and around us can see that our growing pains, our brokenness and sins, our loneliness and stress, our old age and disappointments do not fragment us even further but we can realign these very

human experiences with Jesus' cross and resurrection. We can experience and find joy in them! It sounds absurd, **but so does rising from the dead!**

7. In other words, whether it is a matter of formation and mentoring monks, college sems, Nazareth House sems or the high school sems, all have one and only one purpose: to learn how to reread into all the details of daily living the signs of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit that God places before us as our living space and goal.

8. Such an activity permits us to experience many times a day how astonishing it is to dwell in our Father's house. All the ordinary and regular activities are disrupted and realigned to become an expression of Jesus' death and resurrection. The paradox is that this "Temple of his Body", which becomes the Temple of our body, at the doxology and Holy Communion, is not made with human hands. **This the key to fully understanding both the Old and New Testaments and to the daily formation that takes place in this church and in the four communities on this hill.**