

HOMILY FOR HOLY CROSS CONVENT COSTOCK 14 JULY 2012

THE RIGHT REVEREND DR. DAVID HOPE

'For with God nothing shall be impossible' (Lk: 1.37)

It was when I was to be ordained bishop that some friends presented me with the pectoral cross which I wear this morning. It was made by a young man who can neither read nor write, living in some remote part of Ghana and yet who is able to fashion the most beautiful of things even with his meagre tools, and for this cross simply with a picture sent to him by my friends. Being the committed Christian believer that he is, on his own initiative he fashioned a Ghanaian Adinkra symbol on the reverse – a symbol which is my text this morning – 'with God nothing shall be impossible' – a very necessary encouragement not only for a bishop but for each and every one of us and not least for this Community.

And I suspect that when many of us first learned that the Community was beginning to consider seriously the possibility of moving away from Rempstone to a new and purpose built Convent – although we may have thought it and didn't like to say it – the word 'impossible' might just have strayed into our thoughts at some stage bearing in mind the enormity of such a project for so few. But then that would have been to underestimate the determination of Mothers superior and communities of nuns – but yet even more importantly the testimony of faith down through the ages beginning with Abraham who we are told 'went out not knowing where he was to go' and not least the God to whom this day we give thanks, the God 'with whom nothing shall be impossible'.

Yes the God of impossibilities, the God who in Christ heals the sick, makes the deaf to hear and the lame to walk, who raises the dead and who stills the storm – so many impossibilities which become possibilities. Furthermore the New Testament testifies to this same God who makes much out of little – the five thousand fed with but five barley loaves and two small fish, the testimony to the risen Christ not to thousands but to one woman, Mary Magdalene in the garden where he had been buried, and then the spread of the Good news of what God had done in Jesus through the testimony of the Twelve at the beginnings of the apostolic mission – who would have thought it - a testimony which was to change the whole course of human history.

What we are about today then can surely be said to be a celebration of the God for whom nothing is impossible – the God for whom small is beautiful. I need not rehearse the story of the construction of this lovely

place - that is to be found elsewhere, but from beginning to end – from the first tentative exploration for a new site through endless negotiations and permissions to be sought, any lesser individual or group might well have given up at the first hurdle – and I know that Mother and the Sisters have certainly held their breath – even may have crossed their fingers more than once throughout the process wondering whether it all might fall at the final hurdle. But no you have remained committed to your vision – a vision which through prayerful waiting upon God you believe to be His will and His way for you at this time. Having myself only fairly recently downsized and the sheer time and effort not to mention the seemingly endless slog that such a move involved, I simply cannot image how you actually made it in the end from Rempstone to here, but made it you have and today any visitor would think you had been here all along. Indeed I am aware that from my recent visit after Easter just how much 'at home' already you feel.

And now today we come to this Eucharistic celebration for the Dedication of this church and convent – and that word 'dedication' has been much in use during this Jubilee year of the Queen. Indeed the Archbishop of Canterbury you may recall in his sermon in St Paul's Cathedral focussed his thoughts and reflections around the very word - 'dedication'. And its certainly a word which immediately springs to my mind at least with regard to this community's move here – a dedication borne out of a love of God and a readiness to give and be given in His service. Indeed the Archbishop, eschewing more modern and somewhat superficial understandings of the word, and taking us into a deeper biblical and theological exploration, remarked – 'dedication' – 'is to declare a lifelong dedication, is to take a huge risk, to embark on a costly venture. But it is also to respond to the promise of a vision that brings joy'.

So here is no grim gritting of the teeth kind of dedication, a dedication of resentment which only leads to joylessness – a dedication of dejection. Here in both the project and the life lived out is that truly sacrificial offering in faith and in love – a dedication to which each of you are committed through who and what you now are as members of this community – a dedication which actually is for every Christian yet focussed here in the Religious Life in a very particular and special way and not least through prayer and worship and the Eucharistic celebration day by day – that moment in which Christ is received the memory of his passion renewed, the soul filled with grace and a pledge of glory given us. What greater reward or joy could there ever be!

And then there's another word which springs to my mind today – and not wholly unconnected – it is the word 'consecration' – yes a setting apart of this holy place – a recognition that the space marked out by the four walls

of this church is truly 'holy to the Lord' – as already we have heard in the Reading from Genesis – 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'. It rather reminds me of a visit I made some years ago now in company with one of the bishops to a convent in Romania – and as we approached the entrance to this walled convent in the Transylvanian countryside, the bishop turned to me and said – 'now, see, we are about to enter heaven.' And in the brilliant sunshine and with the profusion of colourful spring flowers and the continuous chanting of the nuns from inside the church, it did indeed feel like heaven on earth.

But then the dedication/consecration of this place is no exclusive or constraining dedication. Rather it is a reminder to each and every one of us that the whole church is called to be holy to the Lord – that the whole earth is holy to the Lord – and not least you and I are a people who, through the waters of baptism, are holy to the Lord – and you dear Sisters a community holy - consecrated to the Lord – a consecration which each of you received at your Profession as a member of this Community of the Holy Cross – the total surrender of all that you have and are - gladly, willingly and joyfully sacrificed in love to the one who Himself surrendered all upon the cross yet who in such self giving broke the bonds of death and who comes among us this very day at this very hour in His real presence as we celebrate these holy and awesome mysteries.

At the end of the day that is what this community this church and these buildings are for – as the foundation stone has it – Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam – to the greater glory of God. And as St Irenaeus reminds us – 'the glory of God is a human person fully alive'. May then this conventual church and all the surrounding buildings which today we dedicate - indeed the countryside around - enable the more completely and totally that fully aliveness in each one of us as in dedicating these buildings made with hands we refresh and renew ourselves our souls and bodies the more fully and wholly to the greater glory of God. And for you this Community trusting in his promises in the manner of your Founder Elizabeth Neale and with the encouragement of Fr Lowder, remaining confident that the God who has been with you in all your ups and downs, in your move from Haywards Heath to Rempstone and now from Rempstone to here at Costock – the God who has been with you over these one hundred and fifty five years is with you still as you now look forward in faith and hope and love daily dedicating yourselves in His service – 'for with God nothing shall be impossible' – and who knows what surprises he has yet in store not only for yourselves, but for each and every one of us!