

If you stand at the west end of this Basilica and look up above the great doors, you will see the memorial slabs. Stone tablets set high into the wall, engraved with the names of former pupils who died in the First World War. You have to lift your eyes to see them. Their names are part of the architecture. They are part of the Church.

And it is this that today's feast helps us understand. Today the Church celebrates the **Dedication of the Archbasilica of the Most Holy Saviour and of Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist in the Lateran** – the oldest church building in the world, the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome, the *mother and head of all the churches in the city [of Rome] and the world*. That's quite a title. But today's feast is about more than a particular building in Rome – it is more about what the Church truly is.

Because the Church is not for the popes, bishops, clergy, or marble and stone. The Church is far more than its hierarchy or its buildings – it is the whole people of God, the Body of Christ.. Built of living stones – men and women, baptised into His death and resurrection, held together by grace. That includes all of us – students, teachers, parents, parishioners, Old Gregorians returning after time away – we are the living Church in this place.

This Basilica is part of that same Church. Our spiritual home. For over a century, people have come to be baptised, confirmed, to receive their First Communion. Some have professed vows here; others have been ordained. Generations of pupils have gathered for the start of the school year, for leavers' Mass, for exam prayers, for carol services. Funerals have taken place here – of monks, teachers, parents, students. And every November, we gather to remember the dead.

So this building holds memory. Joyful and sorrowful. It holds the echo of prayers spoken in faith and prayers whispered in silence. More than bricks and mortar; it is a place where the Church is alive. The Church is more than a building. St Paul tells us plainly in the second reading: *You are God's building... you are the temple of God, and God's Spirit dwells in you*. Christ Himself is the foundation, and no other can be laid. The Church is alive because Christ is alive – and we are joined to Him, in life and in death.

But how is God's building built, with living stones arranged for His glory? Our own efforts cannot build God's temple ourselves. It happens through grace, and Christ is the foundation stone and the Divine builder. We are joined to Christ, the sure foundation, through the

sacraments. In the first reading, Ezekiel sees water flowing from the side of the Temple – at first a trickle. But as it flows, it becomes a river that gives life wherever it goes. Salt water becomes fresh. Trees bear fruit every month. Leaves bring healing. *Everything will live where the river flows.*

We, the Church, hear the first reading and psalm today because that river is an image of the grace that flows from Christ – from the Temple of His Body. From His side on the Cross came water and blood: baptism and Eucharist. The sacraments are that river. And this Basilica is where that river still flows into our lives. At the font, people are baptised. At this altar, Christ becomes present – Body and Blood. In confession, forgiveness is poured out. In the oil of confirmation and anointing, Christ strengthens and heals. *This* is what keeps the Church alive. This is what makes us living stones.

In the Gospel, Jesus cleanses the Temple and says, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* He is speaking not of a building that took 46 years to build, but of His body. Christ is the true Temple. And we, grafted into Him by baptism and grace, are part of that living temple – the Church.

So the Church is a structure of grace. That brings us back to those names above the doors. The Church is made of the living, yes; but also of the dead – waiting for the call to live again in Christ, aided by our prayers. Those young men – students no older than many here – once sang in this choir, sat in these chairs, looked up at this same roof. They played in the fields under the same Somerset sky. When they left, they did not return. But their names live on in our remembrance, inscribed into the very fabric of this place. Jesus said: *Do this in memory of me.* And our war dead did exactly that every time they came to Mass here, in the very seats you sit in today. The Church remembers them because they are still part of us. The Church is not only the living; but also the saints and the holy souls in purgatory, united in Christ.

So now, we do what they once did — we gather at this altar to remember Christ, and to receive His Body. In Holy Communion we become what we receive: one Body, one Church; living stones, built on Christ, together with those whose names are carved around us.

Here, in the Downside Basilica, remembrance becomes worship, and worship becomes hope. *Eternal rest...*