



Tisbury Catholic Church

Impressive Consecration Ceremony

Two Prelates Take Part

The ceremony of the consecration of the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart, Tisbury, took place on Wednesday. The officiating prelate was His Lordship the Bishop of Clifton (the Rt. Rev. William Lee), who was assisted by His Lordship the Bishop of Plymouth (the Rt. Rev. John Barrett).

The following clergy took part in the ceremony:- The Abbot of Farnborough (the Rt. Rev. Fernand Cabrol, O.S.B. the Rt. Rev. Monsignor Mullins (vicar-general and senior chaplain to the Forces), Rev. M. J. Hyland (St. Osmund's (Salisbury)), Rev. Father Ward (Amesbury), Rev. P. Worsley-Worswick, O.S.B. (Bonham, Stourton), Rev. Father Newin (Salisbury), Rev. Father Fellows, M.A., LL.B. (Fonthill Abbey); Rev. Father J. J. Burbage (Wardour), Rev. Father Dagnaux (Lyons, France), Rev. Aloysius Jackson, O.D.C. (St. Luke's Priory Church, Wincanton), Rev. Father D. Donze (Shaftesbury), Rev. Father P. V. Hackett (St. John's, Bath), Rev. B. Ellis (Chipping Sodbury, Gloucestershire), Rev. P. Barry, Rev. M. Reidy (the Pro-Cathedral, Clifton, Bristol), Rev. Father Ignatius Gurd (Downton), Rev. Father Power (Frome), and the Rev. Father Cyril Hookway (parish priest of Tisbury). The Rev. D. Foran, private secretary to His Lordship the Bishop of Clifton, was master of ceremonies.

In these days, writes a special correspondent, we are more familiar with the "opening" of a church than with the spectacle of its solemn consecration, which was witnessed in Tisbury on Wednesday morning last. The splendour of the ceremony was most impressive, and the ritual used brought us back to the ages of Faith when this solemnity was not an uncommon occurrence in this land. In fact, we, may safely assert that the main, features of the consecration formulary which we saw were already to be seen in the very beginning of the Christian era, their origin being Roman, Gallic, and even Byzantine.

Blessing of the Building

The first act in the ceremony was the procession of the clergy from the Parochial House to the Church of the Sacred Heart headed by the Cross and Acolytes. The church was completely bare, everything (even the benches) having been removed. After the brief interval, during which the twelve candles

(before the crosses on the inside walls of the church) were lighted, the Bishop and clergy (who were alone admitted) came from the church to the sacristy, where the relics to be deposited later on the altar tables were resting on an ornamental bier. Here the clergy recited the Seven Penitential Psalms, during which the Bishop of Clifton vested in cope and mitre for the ceremony. We are informed that the relics of the saints were those of early Christian Martyrs, namely, St. Clement and St. Lawrence (for the High Altar) and St. Eustace and St. Felix (for the Lady Altar).

The procession then made its way from the sacristy to the main door of the church, where the Bishop performed the ritual blessing of Holy Water. Three times the Bishop walked round the building sprinkling it each time with Holy Water, first the higher part of the walls, then at the height of his eyes, and finally the lowest part near the foundations. Up till then the church was empty except for one deacon, and its doors were closed.

Three times the Bishop knocked the door with the end of his pastoral staff and asked for admission for the King of Glory, Who was about to enter into possession of His House. The doors were then opened by the deacon, and the Bishop and clergy advanced half-way up the deserted nave and, kneeling down, recited the Litany of the Saints, during which ashes were sprinkled on the floor in the shape of an X, or St. Andrew's Cross. With his pastoral staff the Bishop traced upon the little mounds of ashes the letters of the Greek and Latin alphabet.

The great cross on the floor of the church signifies a taking possession in the name of God. The diagonal lines, right across the building, are a reminiscence of the practise of Roman surveyors who, when measuring property or land, staked it out by means of such diagonal lines, marking them with the letters of the alphabet. The meaning of the highly symbolic act is made even plainer when we bear in mind that, not only is the cross the emblem of Christ, but the X-shaped letter is the first letter of His name in the Greek language. In this ceremony, therefore, the Bishop, as it were, surveys and measures the site on which the church stands, seals it with the name of Christ, and marks it off as belonging henceforth to Him alone.

The Bishop then proceeded to the ceremony of the blessing of water, salt, wine and ashes mixed together. The water thus blessed is called "Gregorian" in memory of the Apostle of England, who prescribed its use for the purification of the temples of the converted Anglo-Saxons. Dipping his finger in the water thus blessed, the Bishop traced a cross upon the centre of the altar table and upon its four corners. A prayer was then recited, and on its completion the Bishop walked seven times round the altar, sprinkling it all the time, then three times round the church, sprinkling the inner walls.

Consecration of the Altar

Without the use of holy oil there can be no consecration. Such has always been the mind of the Fathers of the Church. Three times the Bishop anointed the altar with holy oil; twice with the oil of catechumens and once with sacred chrism. Then three times he incensed it on all sides.

All this wonderful symbolism takes us back to the days of the Patriarchs of old. The Bishop himself starts the antiphon, which tells of Jacob pouring oil upon the stone on which he had rested his head. The clouds of incense are the outward symbol of the Church's prayer. Not only the altar, but the very walls and doors of the sacred edifice were likewise anointed with the sacred chrism - the oil of confirmation and royal unctions.

Returning to the altar the Bishop completed the consecration. Wax crosses, resting on grains of incense, were burnt upon the altar. This was the crowning moment of the function. At the same time the same ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Plymouth, who consecrated the Lady Altar simultaneously with the Bishop of Clifton at the High Altar.

The Lady Altar has been rebuilt by Lady Arundell of Wardour, and added to it is a new reredos in dove-colour Sicilian marble.

Procession of Relics

So far we have not mentioned one of the outstanding features of the consecration ceremony, namely the procession of the holy relics of the martyrs and their deposition in the altars.

During the ceremony the Bishop and clergy went to the place where the relics are kept, and the sacred remains were placed upon an ornamental bier carried by four priests round the outside of the church, the clergy repeating all the time "Kyrie Eleison" ("Lord have mercy.") The relics were finally carried into the church, and at this juncture the people, who up to this time had remained outside the church for over one hour, were admitted.

In each of the altars was a "sepulchre", or cavity, about two inches in depth. This was anointed with chrism and the relics were deposited therein, and the cavity sealed with a marble cover.

The Bishop of Clifton then celebrated the Mass of the dedication of a church, with all the clergy around him in the choir.

There was a crowded congregation, among whom in the church were the following:- Lady Arundell of Wardour, Mr. and Mrs. R. de Pentheney O'Kelly, Mrs. Engleheart, Mr. H. Cooper, Captain Bull, Mrs. Bull, Mrs. Gornall, Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Fairlie, Mr. R. M. Lush, Mr. H. Gurd, Mr. George Burt, Mrs. Trotter, Mrs. J. Walsh, Miss M. J. Burt, a party from Bath, and many others.

The cross bearer was Mr. A. E. H. Swinstead; acolytes, W. Gurd and J. Bull; thurifer, C. Reid; book-bearer, M. Bull; crozier bearer, G. Brown; mitre, W. Asprey; candle-bearer, J. Reid; masons: High Altar, Mr. F. Bell; Lady Altar, Mr. J. Bell.

Luncheon

A luncheon was subsequently given to the clergy at the Victoria Hall, Tisbury. The first toast was "The Pope and the King," proposed by His Lordship the Bishop of Clifton, who immediately afterwards proposed the health of the Parish of Tisbury, coupling with it the name of Father Hookway, the parish priest. His Lordship spoke most graciously of the Right Hon. Anne Lucy Lady Arundell of Wardour, through whose generosity this function had been possible. He said that were it not for her ladyship, there would be no presbytery and no priest in Tisbury. He referred to the acquisition by the Diocese of the Parochial House and of West End Stores, and also of the extension to the sacristy and the building of the passageway from church to house.

Father Hookway responded on behalf of the people of Tisbury and rose to propose the toast of the Bishop of Clifton, coupling with it the Bishop of Plymouth.

The Bishop of Plymouth (the Rt. Hon. J. Barrett) replied, and said that the relations between clergy of the Diocese of Clifton and the Diocese of Plymouth had always been most friendly.

The Bishop of Clifton then proposed the health of Abbot Cabrol and Monsignor Mullins, S.C.F. (Tidworth). The Abbot replied, and said that St. Benedict, in his rule, prescribed "silence" during the meal and he thought that people should remember this when speaking after dinner. (Laughter).

Monsignor Mullins, in his reply, gave great praise to the priests of the Diocese of Clifton who were serving the camps on Salisbury Plain and spoke of their co-operation with the Military Chaplains.

The sacristy and other extensions to the church premises were carried out by Messrs. F. Bell & Sons, Tisbury.

Western Gazette, Friday, 14 September 1934