

Address at the Requiem Mass for Keith Bennett.

St Chrysostom's Church 27th February 2010.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were years of life and great change in England. They were years of a new vibrancy, alongside old traditions. The world and everyday life was changing.

Keith was born into this and in his short life he embodied it. He was a local boy, of a local family, the first of his mother's eight children. Born at St Mary's just a few hundred yards away, lived locally in Eston Street, he went to school locally – at Plymouth Grove school and then he began secondary school in Daisy Bank Road. He came here, to St Chrysostom's Church for Sunday school.

We are here to remember a boy who lived in, walked in and played in the streets so many of us know. We remember a boy who lived among us in this community, our community.

Keith embodied so much of his time he was of a local family, a local boy. He played simple street games – marbles, chasing and football. He loved animals and kept guinea pigs and had a tortoise.

Keith's years were also years of change in everyday life and Keith embraced that too – he wore bell bottom trousers, he enjoyed the Beatles, and the music and culture of the time.

Keith was part of the make up of our community. His life was centred in his family and in this locality. Just in the week he was taken he won a certificate for swimming at Victoria Baths – just across the road from his house, the baths where he and his mother went swimming together.

Then on Tuesday 16th June 1964, four days after his birthday, Keith was snatched from our streets. His story, his local story, became part of an evil episode in the history of our nation. A frightening reminder that these could also be terrible, tragic, turbulent years. The dreadful events of the moors murders deeply affected not only the families involved, but the whole nation, and indeed they remain alive in the memory of the community and nation to this day. Terrible evil was manifest, it was as if the devil walked among us in our streets.

Keith was taken as a young boy, as he walked to his grandmother's. The details of what happened then can hardly be spoken out loud, suffice it to say that he was murdered, and buried anonymously. For twenty years nothing for certain was known of Keith's fate, then came the admission of moors murderers.

Keith was one of the five victims and had been buried in an anonymous grave on Saddleworth moor, far away in the hills. There then followed years and years of searching, years of wanting to bring him back to here, to his family and to his community. Years of

wanting to enfold him in care and love, and years of wanting to break the isolation of his unknown grave.

The search brought many people together, and affected deeply many people. People who were unknown to each other have joined to try to return Keith to his family, to his home area.

It is not to be - yet. We come here to St Chrysostom's church. We come to this place – our place, Keith's place, and we gather in this community Keith knew. We come with Winnie, Keith's mother, with his family, his friends, members of this community today. We come here in prayer, in faith, in hope, to remember Keith to bring Keith here in our prayers and memories, and to pray for his peace and for the peace for his family.

One day we may return here. One day we may welcome Keith's physical remains back to his home area.

Today we come with grieving memories, in sorrow but also with hope, and we remember Keith.

We hold ourselves with Keith before God in this holy place, at the heart of this community.

We gather here before the crucifix in Church, the Cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who was tortured, who suffered, on hill far away, and was buried in unknown grave. Here, before the cross we remember Keith and hold him in prayer. For us the Cross is the sign that death will not win, evil will not prevail. God's love and kingdom will overcome.

In this Mass in which we remember Jesus Christ and meal he gave us, we also remember Keith and his simple everyday family life in those vibrant years of the 50s and 60s - so cruelly cut short.

Here at Mass Christ feeds us, and here Christ welcomes us. And this care, this welcome of our Lord goes especially to Keith and to all children. Jesus welcomes them, and draws them to himself and into his everlasting peace and kingdom.

The Gospel today tells us that Jesus welcomed children, he took them in his arms and he blessed them. Our Lord reaches out to us, Our Lord reaches out to Keith, and says "Come to me...I will give you rest."