

## **The Feast of the Dedication of St Chrysostom's Church 2009**

### **Father Ian Gomersall**

How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Leaving his home, Jacob travels through a waste land, without buildings or shelter. Night falls. It is dark. He is forced to stop and rest. Alone, and without familiar comforts Jacob dreams and discovers that, called or not called, God is present. God is in that place, and Jacob did not know it. He rises in the morning and marks the land as holy by raising a stone, and pouring oil upon it. And so came about, the Bible story tells us, Bethel, which in later years was to be a great centre of pilgrimage. Through his dream, Jacob's spiritual vision was enlarged. In that deserted and waste place, heaven touched earth

I would like to take you, in imagination to the banks of Lake Lucerne in Switzerland. We are away from built up areas, by the banks of a lake surrounded by trees and steep hills and mountains. By the water's edge we see a strange white house, which looks like a small collection of buildings, with dark cone-like rooves. We go towards this picturesque unusual building and we see, engraved above the main door the words 'Called or not called, God is present'

We have come to the private retreat at Bollingen of that great explorer of the human mind and the inner life, Carl Jung. Jung planned the house, and had it built to express himself, it was to be a space of repose and renewal, a place away from the busy-ness of the world.

In the centre of the house Jung built a room where he could, he said, exist for himself alone. "In my retiring room," Jung wrote, "I am myself. I keep the key with me at all time; no one else is allowed in without my permission. Here I have done paintings, and expressed those things which have carried me out of time into seclusion, out of the present into timelessness. Thus it has become for me a place of spiritual concentration." Here is space for the spaceless kingdom.

More than 150 years ago people of this area chose this land at the centre of the developing Victoria Park as a special place, a place for holiness and prayer, a place for a church. Over 130 years ago St Chrysostom's was completed, and, in a rapidly changing world, this building remains a sign of God's presence in this area, a house of God, a place of spiritual concentration, a gateway to heaven.

Here people have come, and continue to come, to give thanks, to cry, to pray. Here, at significant events in family and community life, people of the area have gathered. Here week by week, and through the week prayers are offered, the mass is celebrated. The building, the place is sanctified by the prayers the work, and the hopes of worshippers, past and present. This is a place of holiness to which all are welcome.

Called, or not called, God is present. Here the timelessness of heaven interacts with earth. How awesome is this place!

Let me quote from the first verse of a poem I loved as a child:

*The church does seem a touching sight,  
When folk a coming in at door,  
Do softly tread the long ailed floor,  
Below the pillar'd arches height,  
With bells a peeling,  
Folk a kneeling,  
Hearts a heeling, with the love  
And peace sent them from above.*

We offer here, a retiring space, a touching sight, a place for repose and renewal for all. More than a place where we offer Mass, more than a place where we say prayers, our parish Church offers a living reminder, a sacramental sign, that the spiritual is real and embodied among us. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Of his retiring room Jung wrote: 'I had in mind what I had seen in Indian houses, in which there is usually an area – though it may be only a corner of a room separated by a curtain – to which people can withdraw. ...Such an area of retirement is essential in India, where people live crowded very close together.'

Such a place of quiet and reflection is essential today, here in our busy and active area. For you, for me, for all who come through the door, St Chrysostoms offers this space of stillness, holiness and peace. Our parish church is a place to pray, a place to be yourself, a place of love, repair, rest and renewal.

When Bishop Fraser preached at the consecration of the Church in 1877 he challenged St Chrysostom's people to cultivate a spirit of generosity and welcome. At the rededication in 1906 Bishop Knox reminded the people of St Chrysostoms of the value of not just weekly but also daily worship. Welcome, generosity and worship remain key themes of our church and of our lives.

Be generous. Seek out places and times of prayer and peace in your lives. Pray that the doors of this church may be open to all, encourage one another to be even more hospitable and welcoming. Delight to come to this holy place, and be yourself here.

Here we have a place of spiritual concentration, a space for all. Here is space for the divine. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.