

My Dear Friends

At long last I am delighted to tell you that the restoration work to our beautiful church building has finally finished. After twelve long months of dedicated work by our Clerk of Works, William Roberts and our main Building Contractor, Lindum BMS Limited of Lincoln and a host of skilled sub contractors, the result is simply breathtaking.

When you consider that this "Grade 2 Listed, Land Mark Building" was a totally derelict shell before the work commenced, and in great danger of collapse. The skill of restoring the fabric has been exacting and very testing indeed. A debt of gratitude goes out to all who have laboured not only to restore the building, but frankly saving it from certain demolition.

We also need to put into perspective the costs involved and the long-term future for this magnificent building. Again I congratulate our funding partners NJM Consultants from Newcastle upon Tyne and in particular the incredible effort of Dr Peter Wilson. Peter has worked with our Clerk of Works and the Priory Funding team to ensure that the contract not only came in on schedule but also within budget. This is quite an extraordinary achievement when one not only considers the complexity of the work, but also takes into account, the elements of unforeseen work. Many problems lay behind what looked like solid structures but when the facades were removed, more often than not what lay behind was nothing more than a horror story of rot and decay.

Today, as I write this letter, the wraps have come off and the building phase for the time being at least is complete. The outstanding works remaining consist of the installation of the stained glass liturgical East window and the installation of the Grand Organ, both are due for completion in time for Easter 2010.

Now we can begin to "fit out" the building. The side aisles of the Nave will be home to our Heritage 900 years of History, Education and Visitor centre. The chancel will be furnished appropriately along with the Sanctuary, Lady Chapel and St James Chapel. We anticipate that this element will take several months as we carefully source furniture that blends with the architecture of the building.

The Balcony will house the Grand Organ, with its mobile console being placed within the Nave. The tower has been prepared for a light peal of six bells, we hope again in the course of time to install them when funds permit.

The costs involved are quite staggering, over £2.1 million has been raised in the way of substantial grants and a fall back contingency loan, borne by the Priory Trust. I am grateful to the Trustees for their constant support and encouragement. Sustainability is the key word as we move forward. The Nave has been equipped with state of the art lighting and sound systems to support the performing arts and drama groups who we hope will make good use of the incredible space.

In addition we will encourage community groups to use the space and the corporate sector also. Great care will be taken to ensure that the integrity of the space is not compromised, as the building clearly is a glorious house of God and at long last, after a period of over thirty years, the building will be returned to its original purpose.

False facades, as I mentioned a little earlier is something of a problem today in a nation where the Church is broken. What do I mean by this? Put in its simplest form, to many our great cathedrals and parish churches look no different at all when viewed from without, it is only when you explore what is taking place within, that the veneer starts to peel and the ruse is exposed. Problem is, it is a lot easier to replace a piece of rotting timber, than to correct the rot that has set in over recent years within main stream Anglicanism, it will be much more difficult to repair. Pray on this my dear friends, for the time being at least there is little more we can do, having said that, never underestimate the power of prayer.

Many years ago, 46 in actual fact, the Grand Organ faced a massive restoration bill; the costs were totally beyond the resources of the parish church it was situated in at that time. There was little alternative other than to dramatically reduce it in size. Over half the instrument was lost, the Choir, Solo and Echo organs were all removed and the number of speaking stops reduced from 65 to 40. When viewed from outside of the case, nothing had changed and indeed the sound from the organ was grand and powerful. What had been lost was the subtlety and versatility. That reality became very apparent, if you ventured into the organ loft, what you saw was the empty spaces created by the losses incurred during its restoration.

An even bigger fate awaited the instrument, when the very building in which it was situated itself was demolished. Christine and I stepped in to save this truly historic organ, an organ classed to be of National Importance, it just goes to show how we as a nation try to protect our Heritage.

That was in 1987 and after thirty years of prayer and hard work, the Organ will soon be taking its place in our restored Cathedral Church, with its Choir and Solo Organs back in place. The fate of St. Katherine's mirrors that of the Organ, this building was closed for worship in 1977, On All Saints Day 2010, it will reopen its doors as a house of God. Be careful how you pray, just look at its power. Praise and Glory Be To God.

So now we wait quietly, just a few more days for our first service to take place and a few more months for our Grand Organ. Life is so busy and hectic for so many, there is hardly time to think, let alone pray, but I ask you to join with me as we remember those for whom life's struggles are hard to bear, for those who have lost loved ones whilst serving our nation in conflicts abroad. Let us pray also for all those who have entered before us through the doors of St. Katherine's and for the Gilbertine's who founded this truly sacred place. Be still just for a moment also, as we pray for the life and witness of our Communion throughout the world, and especially for our Archbishop and Our Episcopal Visitor. And finally remember in your prayers, those who are searching for their true spiritual home, those trapped beneath the collapsing facade and those who have yet to feel within their hearts, the majesty and Grace of Our Blessed Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Please do come when you can, and see for yourselves this beautiful place, you will be most welcome.

A Meditation for the end of the Church's year

Peace Restored

As we move into an unknown, uncertain and unpredictable new season, the gift we all most need is that of inner serenity. And a gift it is, however meditation, relaxation and other human techniques may help to develop it. "My peace I give unto you," said Jesus to all his disciples. "Not as the world giveth, give I to you." The divine gift is, in essence, quite different from anything the world can offer. "Be still and know that I am God," exhorts the Psalmist, again. In a world of insecurity, literal and spiritual, having a still centre in the depths of our being remains the strongest element in our effort to cope with the strain and stresses, personal and corporate, that will surely face us in the coming Christian year.

To many, this opening statement will feel to be no more than religious verbiage, irrelevant to the facts of life today. How can we possibly feel any sense of inner harmony and calmness, faced as we are by the appalling cruelty of violent crimes, the scenes of starvation it is almost impossible to watch, the sufferings of the innocent in serial killings, sectarian violence and sexual abuse ? How can we now believe that there is a Providence "working his purpose out as year succeeds to year" ? What purpose is there in prayer when pressing petitions for peace, healing and unity seem to remain unanswered ? It is not surprising that, in a world like ours, religion is being dismissed as irrelevant, and faith is treated with indifference.

Yet the miracle persists ! The Bible, though despised and rejected, attacked and abused, subjected to radical and often hostile criticism, survives and continues to be the highest-selling book in the world. The church, especially where it has been persecuted and faced with obliteration, is alive and strengthened by its sufferings. Many people testify to miracles of healing, reconciliation and inner change.

For those who have lost faith, hope and, especially serenity, the Old Testament provides an encouraging reminder : "He heard my cry -and gave back my peace." The miracle of grace is expressed in words of restoration - reconciliation, reformation, regeneration, redemption, and renewal. They all speak of the possibility of a return to a right relationship with God, and consequent loving relationships with others, self and earth. Peace is restored. In a world which Jesus assured us would be one of tribulation, serenity can be recovered. The gift of God's peace is always on offer.