

Homily Given by Fr Joe Gallagher PP Tullamore at Rededication Ceremony

They had just escaped. Moses was leading the people to freedom and to a new promised land. As they wandered through the desert they carried with them the Ark of the Covenant, this was sacred. This was God's promise to them that he would always be with his people. In the desert they lived in tents and there was a special tent, set aside for the Tabernacle that held the Ark of the Covenant. This is where God lived among his people. This is known as the Tent of Meeting.

A few years ago they were building a new chapel in Lourdes for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. They did a very fine job on it. In the centre is a golden pillar a reminder of the pillar of fire that led Moses and the people of Israel through the desert. And the entire roof design of the Church is done like a tent with canvas sheeting. As you come to pray, as you come to be in the presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, you are in the Tent of Meeting.

Every church is a Tent of Meeting. Let it be the finest and most ornate Cathedral to a galvanized tin hut in a poor village, this is where God lives, this is where we meet our Lord and Saviour.

There is a rich history to this church we are in today and which has been so tastefully renovated. We congratulate all involved and the quality of the work achieved. The installation of a new reredos, altar, ambo and chair, which are sympathetic to the overall design of the church. The warm blend of colours, the restored parquet floor, the new tabernacle is all part of a church that is peaceful and welcoming. We do not know exactly when first church was built on this site, but it was probably in the mid 1700s. Earlier we know that in penal times, when there could not be a church, mass was celebrated at the Mass rock in Agall and there are three other Mass rocks in the parish.

When we travel back a little further back into our history we meet St. Carthage, a Kerryman, who came to these parts and to the monastery of St. Coleman in Lynally and in 595 he founded his monastery here in Rahan. It was a significant centre of learning and it is believed that over 800 monks once lived here. In this general area east of the Shannon there were almost twelve major monasteries. It was a very interesting time in Irish history and Carthage and Coleman and Columcille and Ciaran have left us and indeed Europe, with a rich legacy.

In 1815 Miss Maria O'Brien of Rahan Lodge, a confidante of Archbishop Murray of Dublin and of Daniel O'Connell leased part of her land at Tullabeg to the Jesuits. They set up the college of St. Stanislaus which was a school and later a house for novices and scholastics for the Irish/English province and later still a House of Philosophy and then a retreat house. The Jesuits and the College have

been a very important part of the fabric of this community. They had a well-used public chapel and then another chapel with the famous Eve Hone windows.

The presentation convent was founded here, 16 July 1817. The first nuns arrived by canal boat from Georges Hill, Dublin on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. They came at the invitation and through the generosity of Miss Maria O'Brien of Rahan Lodge, who later entered the community and died in 1827. The presentation sisters have been an inspiring presence here ever since that time and we owe them a great gratitude. This convent was also instrumental in establishing the Presentation Mission to India. The presentation nuns have educated generations of people here and they are still an important presence in the parish.

I mentioned that Daniel O Connell was friendly with Maria O'Brien. He visited Rahan on a few occasions. You'll notice in the sanctuary an oil painting of the crucifixion, which has hung in the church for many years. It has now been restored and placed in a gilded frame. I'm told that in Derrynane House, in Kerry, there is a similar painting. Is there a link with O Connell? We're not sure, there probably is.

Here in the sanctuary also are the graves of four priests.

1. Laurence Cunningham a native of Mayo who died in 1846.
2. John Coghlan, a native of Ballycumber who died in 1847.
3. Joseph Fitzgerald, a native of Tullamore who died in 1856.
4. Thomas Byrne, a native of Mullingar died in 1859.

So in the space of 13 years four parish priests died here. I hope history doesn't repeat itself – look after the parish priest.

We are now in demanding times and the number of priests in the diocese is falling and the average age is rising. This is going to affect every parish and current practices, as we know them, will change. It's going to be a challenge for all of us. This parish has produced many vocations. On this day, as we rededicate our Church I would ask that everyone continues to pray for vocations. And even more than that, if there is somebody you know and you think they may have a vocation, speak to them about it. Ask them. Invite them. Those words of invitation are very often the key.

The Parish of Rahan now has three fine churches, Killina now dedicated to St. Carthage, Mucklagh dedicated to St. Coleman and the Island built in the 1830's and dedicated to St. Patrick.

The church building is an integral part of any faith community. It is here that we come for the defining moments of our lives. We are brought for baptism, for first confession, for Holy Communion, for confirmation, for marriage, for ordination and we come to the church at the end of our lives to be commended to the Lord. It is the place where we pour out and celebrate our deepest moments in the company of the Lord and the Lord's people. This is the place where we come for great community occasions. It is also an oasis for a few quiet moments, away from the frenzied activity of life to sit and be still with the Lord.

This is a sacred space; this is where God lives among us.

God lives here and God breaths life into the community that gather here. This is the real power and importance of a church. The physical condition of the building speaks of the importance of faith in the community. A well-maintained and welcoming church reflects the invitation of God. The church is a living building not an architectural fascination or a museum. In this place living people gather as they sincerely try to follow God's ways. This is where we come as we try to take the bits and pieces of our own lives and build them into a worthwhile and faithful life.

When we come to Mass we do not come alone. We come as people from the community. We come to pray, not only for ourselves, but also with one another and for one another. We gather around the altar in response to God's invitation.

St. Paul, in our reading today speaks of us being "*living stones - let yourselves be built into a spiritual house*". Today as a parish community, we celebrate the rededication of our church. This is our tent of meeting. This is where God lives among us. Today we rededicate ourselves to God. We are the living stones of his church in this community. We come to this building so that our lives may be built with the Lord as our foundation.

Our first reading tells us that in the Tent of Meeting: -

"The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend."

In this church, the Lord speaks to us, face to face, as a friend.