

**ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL
DEDICATION OF ALTAR: 18 JUNE 2022**

Jesus Christ is the living stone.

I am delighted that we have been able to come together today for the dedication of this altar, already established here in the sanctuary for a number of years as the focal point of our worship. This altar was built during Fr Brian Doolan's term as Administrator of St Chad's and it reminds us of his own sensitive care for the fabric of the Cathedral and his instinctive awareness of the importance of the altar as a sign of the presence of Christ in his church.

The Cathedral church and its community lie at the heart of the family of the Archdiocese. It is the Mother Church of the other 220 parish communities, symbolising the bonds of faith and sacramental life, of prayer, affection and mission which hold us together in Christ. The dedication of an altar is an action of the whole Body of Christ and it expresses and deepens our unity within the Catholic Church.

As a sign of our communion and of the bonds of faith, hope and love that tie us together I am grateful for the presence and participation of parishioners and friends of this Cathedral parish community. The children and staff from St Chad's Primary School remind us of the local community that looks to the Cathedral as its spiritual home – thank you for supporting this occasion.

Others who cannot be here in person are nevertheless joining us via the live-streaming. I would like to mention especially Michael and Barbara Hodgetts, for Michael has provided us with the beautiful, scholarly and evocative hymn in honour of St Chad which we shall sing during this Mass.

Dean Adrian Dorber, the Dean of Lichfield, is a most welcome ecumenical guest and friend at this celebration. I am conscious that, under Dean Adrian's supervision, a new altar for St Chad's relics is at present being prepared for Lichfield Cathedral. That altar will always be a reminder of the ecumenical friendship between our two cathedrals which owes so much to the ministry and intercession of St Chad. We also remember Bishop Michael Ipgrave, the Bishop of Lichfield, in our prayers today.

I am grateful to Mgr Timothy and the Metropolitan Chapter of Canons for enabling us to celebrate the dedication of the altar on the annual Feast of the Dedication of the Cathedral. It is a fitting day for the launch of the new diocesan History and Archives Commission – and I am grateful to Professor Judith Champ for being the driving force behind this welcome initiative.

As you know, this altar has already supported the celebration of the Eucharist for several years. During Holy Week the Oil of Chrism was consecrated upon this altar and it will now be anointed with the same chrism as the permanent place of prayer and sacrifice.

Whenever the priest venerates the altar with a kiss at the beginning of Mass he honours it as a consecrated symbol of the presence of Christ. Today's Gospel reminds us that we should not approach the altar until we have resolved our differences with others. The altar is a reminder that the healing and forgiving power of God is readily available in this place.

The ceremony of dedication which we are about to begin serves to remind us that the life of the community which is at home here is being renewed in every succeeding generation. In this place we preserve a link with previous generations of Catholics whose heritage of faith we have received we take up our responsibility to hand on that faith.

The altar has been prepared by Mr Eric Knight and his associate craftsmen to receive the relics which will now remain here permanently. The relics of Blessed Dominic Barberi, who received Cardinal St John Henry Newman into full communion with the Catholic Church, remind us of our responsibility to teach, live and share the Catholic faith with others. Blessed Dominic is a powerful witness of the commitment of the Church to evangelisation.

The altar is a reflection of God's presence in the midst of his people. In these surroundings, close to the relics of St Chad, we are drawn into the mystery of God's goodness. Week by week, we gather together here for prayer, the proclamation of the Scriptures and the celebration of the sacraments. This Cathedral is a welcome refuge in the city and a peaceful place of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

In a few moments the altar will be anointed with the Oil of Chrism. The Cathedral community are also re-dedicated to the service of God and anointed by Christ with his Holy Spirit. Carry his love and his mercy from here into your homes, among the neighbours where you live, the colleagues with whom you work and the friends whose company lightens your hearts. May the prayers of St Chad and Blessed Dominic Barberi inspire us to build our lives on *Jesus Christ - the living stone*.