

**HOMILY FOR THE RUBY JUBILEE OF THE DEDICATION OF THE
CHURCH OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI, HOLBECK
SUNDAY 16TH MARCH 2025, THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT**

I am delighted to be with you this morning for the Ruby Jubilee of the Dedication of this church of St Francis of Assisi. I know that you have prepared well for this important occasion, and I thank Fr Timothy, and all of you who have worked with him to prepare for this Ruby Jubilee.

It was a pleasure to read the copy of the booklet that was used for the Mass of Dedication, and which was celebrated by one of my predecessors, Bishop William Gordan Wheeler, on this very day, forty years ago. It was very kindly given to me by your parish priest, Fr Timothy, ahead of today's celebration.

I was fascinated to read, not only the story of the building of the church, from the cutting of the ground on 28th May 1984 to its completion just prior to March 1985, but also the history of the Parish in this part of the diocese. We know that Mass began to be celebrated regularly in Holbeck in 1882 and that a beautiful church dedicated to St Francis of Assisi in Manor Road, the first one dedicated to St Francis in the Diocese of Leeds, predated this one from 1896 until it was demolished in 1979.

On this day we might feel a little like those Apostles, Peter, James and John with the Lord on that Mount of the Transfiguration. With St Peter, our cry of prayer and praise today is: "Master, it is good that we are here..."

The history of this church, and the one that preceded, reveals that it was built by Catholics who were poor in monetary wealth but who were rich in faith, hope and love. The Catholic faithful who lived in this area built their churches to strengthen the visible presence of the faith in this area of Leeds. They wanted to build on a firm foundation, and that foundation was not just a matter of architecture and the fabric of the building's construction, but the foundation stone of the Universal Church, Jesus Christ, and the rock on which the Lord built His Church, St Peter. Communion with the See of Rome and fidelity to the successor of St Peter, the Pope and Bishop of Rome, had been a hallmark of the martyrs who had gone before them in recusant times and of their forefathers in the faith in this country before the protestant reformation.

They knew that here in a Catholic church building, with the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass and the real presence of the Lord Jesus in the Tabernacle, the risen Christ is encountered in a unique and intimate way. They also knew that the joy of that encounter with the Lord must be told in the very structure of the church. This is why, in the tradition of the Catholic Church, the presence of sacred imagery, colour, light and beauty, music and art, are used to help raise the hearts and minds of those worshiping within its walls to contemplate the goodness, beauty and truth of God the Father our Creator, of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, and of the Holy Spirit, our sanctifier.