

**Sermon preached by  
Bishop Michael Colclough at  
St Clement Notting Dale on  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Consecration and the  
Feast of Christ the King,  
26 November 2017**

What a beautiful, sun-lit morning for our Feast. Did you appreciate the fresh, clean air and the clean pavements as you came to church this morning? I hope so because things were very different here 150 years ago. In those days, in Notting Dale, dairy farming had given way to a vast brickworks and to the pig keepers who had been moved out from Marble Arch. Your predecessors of the day lived in the filth created by pigs and brickworks. Yes, pigs, here. In 1840 there were 1000 people, mostly living 12 to a house, living in Notting Dale and over 3000 pigs. Dickens referred to this area as a “plague spot” because here were some of the worst slums in the land.

In 1867, while Queen Victoria was laying the foundation stone of the Royal Albert Hall in the more fashionable Kensington Gore, this less-famous church building of St Clement was consecrated and opened for Christian worship, prayer and ministry. Who did it all? Not Queen Victoria but a loyal subject of hers who owned an even greater allegiance to another King, to Jesus Christ the King, whose feast we keep today.

Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson, your founder, came to this area out of love and loyalty to Jesus. He was responding to those words of Jesus to another young man in St Matthew's Gospel, "Go, sell all your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven". Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson was curate at St Stephen's Shepherds Bush when

he heard that Gospel call to help create a new and better life for the poor people of Notting Dale. With that call from God and his own money, Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson built first a temporary church in 1862, then a school in 1866 leading him to the joy of seeing this church consecrated in 1867.

But why did Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson build this beautiful church in the midst of such poverty and need? Why not stop at a school and a community centre? It was because worship and prayer that led him to hear God's call to come to this area, it was worship and prayer that had enriched his comparatively wealthy life beyond the riches of this world. Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson knew that you could not look into the heart of God – which good worship and prayer always lead us to – without seeing and responding to the needs of the

poor and needy, whatever those needs might be. So he built this beautiful church in the hope that it would help lift people's eyes and open their hearts to a glimpse of the wonder and beauty of Heaven. He knew that anyone who caught that vision of heaven would necessarily be involved in establishing God's kingdom of justice, love and peace here in this world, here in Notting Dale.

So our thanksgiving today must include thanks to God for your founder: for his prayer and worship that enabled him to catch a vision for this area; for his faithful discipleship and generous obedience to the call of Jesus. Today's Gospel reading gave us a picture of the final judgment. I am sure that, before the judgment seat of God, Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson heard those wonderful words of Jesus, "Come, you that are blessed by my

Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry in Notting Dale and you gave me food, I was thirsty in Notting Dale and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger in Notting Dale and you welcomed me, I was naked in Notting Dale and you gave me clothing, I was sick in Notting Dale and you took care of me, and when I left Notting Dale to go to prison, you visited me.” We remember Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson’s works today and remember that those works not only challenge us in our day, but have an eternal dimension, an eternal significance and an eternal reward.

Thank God, life Christian life and witness has continued here beyond the work of the founder. Fr Alan, your present vicar, is the ninth priest to follow in Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson’s footsteps. For 150 years the

partnership of priests and people, faithful to their relationship with God in worship and prayer has continued to send them out, responding to that Gospel call of Jesus to serve the people who surround us, to seek to answer their poverty and need, no matter what form it takes.

I thank God that the same spirit is alive and active among you today, 150 years after the Consecration of this House of God. The 14<sup>th</sup> of June this year saw you, as a Christian community, at the centre of sad, tragic days following the destroying fire at Grenfell Tower. Seeing events on the television, from the distance, I was proud to see St Clement's showing again that you share fully in the life of the local community: something that was recognized nationally as you responded to the needs of that particular moment. When asked

by a journalist what happened, Fr Alan said, “I was woken up at 3am by a priest who lives by the tower, and so I came down to the church, opened the doors and turned the lights on.” A very practical response, but also a statement of the Church being what the Church is called to be. Not only the importance of an open church where it was safe to go, but open doors demonstrating the open arms of God’s love for all people and an open church of caring people doing all they could for others who had lost not only homes but loved ones. That, from a Christian Gospel perspective, must be one of the peaks in your 150 years of history: and it was you who did it, you who welcomed into God’s home and your home those who were in need. In the language of the Bible, you loved your neighbour as yourself. Thank you for that. Your patron, that great early bishop St Clement, once told his people: “Charity

unites us to God” – how closely you have been united to God this year. One of those moments that will go down in your history and the history of this parish, something that has also an eternal dimension: “rejoice that your names are written in heaven,” says Jesus.

What I ask of you today is to go on being true to the history of this Church and parish. Fr Arthur Dalgarno Robinson built a beautiful Christian church here to help encourage and inspire people to live beautiful Christian lives. Beautiful lives lived not only in this building and in your homes but lived out in the wider community. I leave you with a final word of encouragement from St Clement: “Follow the saints,” he says, “because those who follow them will become saints”. Your vocation and mine: to be the saints of God in our day. And what do we learn from your Founder? He

soaked himself in the depths of God's love in prayer and worship: that gave him the vision, that enabled, equipped him, to bring God's transforming love into the streets that are now your home, your meeting place with God. Guard, cherish and enjoy all that you have been given: and go on sharing it with others, then you will truly give glory and honour to Christ your King. Amen