


## TO BE DEDICATED IS TO BE FOCUSED

Genesis 28. 11-18

1 Peter 2. 1-10

John 10. 22-29

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Today, we have the privilege of celebrating our Dedication Festival. In the Church of England, the Dedication Festival of a church occurs on the anniversary of the date of its dedication or consecration; alternatively, it is celebrated on the first Sunday in October, which explains why we have our Dedication Festival today.

We know when St Stephen's Church was first opened for worship, and that was on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 1865, the Feast of the Epiphany. The preacher in the morning was the Reverend Charles Guille, who had succeeded his father as Rector of St Peter Port (otherwise known as the Town Church). It was under the charge of Revd Guille that St Stephen's was initially a Chapel-of-Ease to the Town Church. At Evensong on the Feast of the Epiphany, the sermon was preached by the Reverend Henry Rynd, the Curate-in-Charge who had been the appointed by the Rector.

St Stephen's Church was only consecrated in the following year, 1866, when the Bishop of Mauritius, the Right Reverend Dr V W Ryan, came to Guernsey and acted on behalf of the Bishop of Winchester, Dr C R Sumner.<sup>1</sup> At the consecration ceremony, the morning service was conducted by the Reverend O Steele, who was acting as Curate-in-Charge of St Stephen's; and the lessons were read by the Reverend Peter Carey. The beginning of the tradition of good choral music at St Stephen's was evident in the Psalms chanted by the choir, which also sang 'Lift up

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<sup>1</sup> Sumner's daughter-in-law, Mary Sumner, was the founder of the Mothers' Union.

your Heads' from Handel's *Messiah* as the Anthem, alongside Allen's *Morning Service in F*. The organist on that day was a Mr Dunster.

If you had been a reader of *The Star* (one of Guernsey's newspapers) in 1866, you would have been able to discover these details concerning the Consecration service of St Stephen's; and you might have been interested (or irritated, depending upon your point of view) to see the same article supplemented by comments from a 'Visitor Correspondent', who took it upon himself to publish a long diatribe against the Altar, Super-altar and Reredos (or altarpiece) in the Chancel of our church. The correspondent went on to complain further about St Stephen's, and deplored the absence of boards carrying the words of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, which were customary in most Guernsey churches prior to that time.

This 'Visitor Correspondent' was an extreme, militant Protestant, most probably a person who had travelled to the island from England. He was not the only one of his kind; and indeed, the majority of the population in Guernsey was then composed of Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Evangelical and Protestant Anglicans. These people had already heard about, and were increasingly concerned about 'High Church' Anglicans, a group who were growing in number and who were not afraid to show their support of the principles espoused by the Oxford Movement. This movement, which had started in the early 1830s, called for a return to the Catholic Faith and teachings of the Church of England; a return to the original doctrines and disciplines about the Sacraments; and the practice of fasting and prayer. As the Oxford Movement spread, it eventually evolved and broadened into the Anglo-Catholic or Ritualistic Movement.

After St Stephen's Church was opened and consecrated, it remained under the control of the Rector of St Peter Port for the next twenty years, and was served by a variety of Curates. A major change occurred in 1880, when the Reverend Frank

Edward Lowe was appointed by the Rector of St Peter Port as Priest-in-Charge of St Stephen's. Compared to the charges given to previous Curates, the charge given to Revd Lowe was more independent in nature; and by the time Fr Lowe came to Guernsey, he had already served as a Curate in a church which was very much part of the Anglo-Catholic Movement. The opportunity to take sole charge of a church like St Stephen's was a very attractive challenge for a young Priest of Catholic principles.

Fr Lowe was eager to develop these principles as widely as possible; and indeed he did. But after arriving at St Stephen's, he led the church to make gradual progress in the Catholic direction. Starting in July 1880, Fr Lowe followed the dignified traditions practiced in English cathedrals, and introduced the first surpliced choir on the island. Matins and Evensong were said every day (as directed by the *Book of Common Prayer*); and there was a celebration of Holy Communion at 8am every Sunday and on every Feast Day. The first Sung Eucharist was held in our church on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1888.

Other changes were progressively introduced, and St Stephen's developed into a considerable worshipping community, capable of standing on its own feet. Finally, on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1885, St Stephen's was legally declared to be a fully separate Parish; and Fr Lowe was duly inducted as its first Vicar.

During the years that followed, and until his death in February 1918, Fr Lowe never lost sight of his Catholic principles; and he introduced and applied them to St Stephen's. Not only was our church made more beautiful in its design and re-ordering; its services evolved so that they showed more dignity and splendour, worthy of the worship of God. These changes were accompanied by steady and sound teaching, provided by Fr Lowe on the subjects of Scripture and Sacraments.

In a word, we could say that Fr Lowe never lost his *focus*; and as we celebrate our Dedication Festival today, we would do well to ask God to give us a similar focus, not only corporately, but also individually.

In hearing me speak, you might be tempted to think that I have totally abandoned any reference to our appointed scripture texts for today. Yet the first line of our reading from St John's gospel tells us that 'the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem'. This celebration had been instituted to commemorate the re-dedication of the Temple in 164 BC, when the Temple was purified and rebuilt, after having been defiled by both Jews and pagans. The Jews celebrated the Feast of the Dedication each year, and commemorated that date when the Temple had been restored. During the time of the defilement of the Temple, one could say that it had lost its initial purpose and *focus*; and once the Temple was rededicated, the Jews were able to give their Temple (and their worship) a proper focus once again.

It is telling that in this context, our Lord walks *in* the temple, *in* the portico of Solomon. For the Jews, the Temple was the visible sign of God's presence; and Jesus, the Son of God who is one with the Father, is standing before the Jews. It is as if he is offering them yet another, new opportunity, to *focus their worship on him*, the Messiah. He is the visible presence of God among them. The physical building of the Temple is no longer necessary.

Today, as we commemorate and celebrate the focus of Fr Frank Lowe at St Stephen's, may we at St Stephen's also resolve to *focus afresh* on our Saviour, our Shepherd and our Messiah.

Amen.