

# Mass in Lichfield Cathedral

*Just 17 miles north-east of Birmingham, in the very heart of England, lies the city of Lichfield. Some 1300 years ago it was at the centre of the ancient Kingdom of Mercia. When St Chad was made Bishop of Mercia in 669 AD he moved his See from Repton in Derbyshire to Lichfield which was already a site of pilgrimage as it was believed that Christians were martyred there during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian.*

When St Chad died in 672 even more pilgrims began to come to his shrine. In 700 a new church was built to house his bones. (The bones were ordered to be destroyed by Henry VIII when the Shrine to the Saint was dismantled in 1538. After a chequered journey over the centuries, they were entrusted to the care of St Chad's Catholic Cathedral, Birmingham when it was opened in 1841). In 1085 another church was slowly built until, in 1195, work began on what was to become Lichfield Cathedral. Despite grievous damage at the Reformation, and even worse damage during the Civil War, the Cathedral was altered and restored with the principal work done by Sir George Gilbert Scott, the Catholic architect of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral, (among many other buildings), in the mid to late 19th Century.



The pilgrims ceased to come to Lichfield at the Reformation but, on Saturday 13th September 2008, they came again when nearly 900 Catenians and their families, principally from the Midlands Provinces of 6, 15 and 17, wound their various ways to Lichfield to celebrate Mass.

The Dean of Lichfield, the Very Rev Adrian Dorber together with the Bishop of Lichfield and the Rev Wealand Bell, the Precentor of the Cathedral and other Anglican clergy were robed at the side of the Altar.

The Dean warmly welcomed the Catenians and the Catholic clergy. The clergy were led by the Most Rev Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Birmingham, who was to concelebrate Mass together with Auxiliary Bishops Rt Revv David McGough and William Kenney with other local clergy, including Fr John Pascoe of St Mary's, Shifnal in the Diocese of Shrewsbury who had been ordained in Lichfield Cathedral, in attendance.

The Dean then greeted the Catenians who were led by Grand Vice President Joe McNally;

Province 6 Director John Mottram; Bryan Holden, President of Province 6; Patrick Cronin, President of Province 15 and Mike Guerin, President of Province 17, and their ladies. The Civic party, which included the Chairman of Lichfield District Council, the Mayor of Lichfield and the Sheriff of Lichfield, all with their consorts, was also welcomed.

The Bishop of Lichfield, the Rt Rev Jonathan Gledhill, in his turn gave a heart-felt greeting. He praised the Archbishop and said that "England needs leaders such as him" and spoke of his great regard for him.

The Archbishop replied with equal warmth and stated how much he had appreciated and enjoyed working so closely with Bishop Jonathan during his years in the Midlands. They shared much in common and hoped their mutual regard would become even greater. He thanked the Bishop for, "Letting us use this wonderful Cathedral." He went on to say, with a smile, that he would love to have the Cathedral "back" but wouldn't like to have to bear the cost of its upkeep! Affectionate laughter followed. The Archbishop then went on to thank the Catenian Association for all the enormous work it does for the Church in the Midlands and its parishes at every level. The two Bishops shared the Kiss of Peace in what was a very moving moment for all present.



The First Reading of the Mass was given by Provincial President of Province 15, Patrick Cronin of Peterborough Circle and the Second Reading by Bryan Holden of Streetly Circle, Provincial President of Province 6.

The Gospel was then read by Deacon, the Rev Peter Tibke of Liverpool (4) and Droitwich & District Circles.

The Archbishop then gave his Homily high up in the magnificent pulpit of the Cathedral (some of the Homily is reproduced here; the full text can be read on the Catenian website.)

He said that while he appreciated enormously the wonderful work the Catenian Association does for the Church, what he counted most was the Vocations Initiative and the Association's help in trying to find new priests.

The Bidding Prayers were read by Deacon, the Rev Brian Ratcliffe of

Loughborough Circle. The Gifts were brought to the altar by Provincial Vice President Bill and Mary Johnson, Province 6; Provincial Vice President David and Eileen Rowley, Province 15; and Provincial Vice President John and Pauline Hogan, Province 17.

Before the final blessing Provincial President Bryan Holden expressed his appreciation to everyone for their contribution to the success of the day. He thanked the splendid choir under the direction of Streetly brother Ken Mackey and the equally magnificent organ playing by Mike Rudd, also of Streetly Circle.

He went on to thank the Chief Steward Terry Finn and the brothers of City of



Grand Vice President Joe McNally, Province 6 President Bryan Holden, Bishop of Lichfield Rt Revd Jonathan Gledhill

Lichfield Circle for their stewarding at the car parks and in the Cathedral itself. (The chief usher of the Cathedral was heard to say that he couldn't believe the stewards were doing this for the first time in the Cathedral!). He was also full of praise for the organising team (Province 6 Director John Mottram of Kidderminster & District Circle; David Rowley of Derby Circle; David Lloyd of Kidderminster & District Circle and Gil Whale of City of Lichfield Circle together with Bryan himself), for all their efforts over the preceding months and of course the wonderful assistance from the Cathedral authorities and staff.

The Archbishop then spoke, again thanking Bishop Jonathan and Dean Adrian for their very considerable help in making possible such a wonderful Mass. He said, "These great Cathedrals of England stand for so much, particularly in these difficult times for our country. None of us need reminding that a strong Church of England is vital for the Catholic Church in England." He concluded by re-iterating how closely the two Churches worked together in friendship. They were moving ever closer and some day, although perhaps not in this generation, they might be fully together.

The final blessing was given by the four Bishops standing side by side in front of the altar – another profound moment among so many on the day.

The assembled hundreds then processed out through the Great Doors of the Cathedral with the magnificent words of the recessional hymn, "One Church, One Faith, One Lord" reverberating among the venerable vaults of the ancient Cathedral.

The Centenary of the Association in the Midlands had been well and truly celebrated.

## ARCHBISHOP NICHOLS SPEAKS ON FATHERHOOD

Archbishop Vincent Nichols highlighted the meaning and importance of fatherhood, during the Mass. The Archbishop of Birmingham emphasised: "It is here at Mass that we learn who we are - men who wish to follow Christ, men who know that their strength comes from him, men who compete in striving to reach the crown of eternal glory in union with him".

The Archbishop thanked the Catenians for all that they do for the Catholic Church, especially for their work of fostering vocations to the priesthood.

"I ask you to sustain these prayers, to sustain this effort, to speak boldly of the wonder of the call of God to a man to be a priest and to give himself to the Lord in response to the Lord's gift of himself to us".

Recalling that it is a privilege of priests to be called 'Father', Archbishop Nichols explained: "Whether as a priest or as a father of children and former of families, the mystery of fatherhood is a reflection and participation in the mystery of God itself".

The Archbishop continued: "In the embrace of the Cross, God's unimaginable power is shown in the completeness of his self-surrender.

"A comparable act lies at the heart of human fatherhood and the creation of a new child, which makes demands that last a life time".

Exploring the connection between fatherhood and security, the Archbishop emphasised: "We are not a fatherless people. We have a loving father who, in a way that every father tries, oversees our life, holds it in his care and will ensure that our most vital needs are met."

Archbishop Vincent Nichols concluded: "This is the profound truth that Catholic and Christian men today are called to express.

"We must hope and work for a deeper public and political commitment to support and strengthen marriage and family life in our society. This is a message of truth, the truth of our human nature and therefore the source of our stability and health."