Institution

‘Dom, do you in the presence of this congregation commit yourself to this new trust and responsibility?

By the help of God, I do’

The act of Institution of a new Rector to St Michael and All Angels here in Helensburgh is a simple thing. God’s and Dom’s obedient response meet one another. The new Rector is seated and blessed by the Bishop and it is done.

But of course there’s more - the sadness of people from Bridge of Allan – and the anticipation of people here in Helensburgh. The people of Bridge of Allan know for better or worse what Dom is like - mainly for better, I must say. The congregation here waits to see how it will be. Understandably you may forget for a moment that the continuity of a congregation is in its people - while clergy come and go

The readings which we have heard today are full of challenge. St Paul speaks of the gifts of God to his people. We wonder what gifts the new Rector will have – how will he measure up as apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher? Even more importantly, we want to know in these more managerial times whether he can read a financial statement with real insight and whip up a new website for the congregation.

And there are some questions which members of a congregation can reasonably ask. Will he be pastorally faithful? Will he treat worship as the spiritual focus of the life of the congregation and will he work hard at it? Will he be kind? Will he know how to speak the truth which has to be spoken – to speak clearly when it is needed – but to speak with compassion and without anger in a way which can be heard and understood.

But of course Paul’s words are really about the gifts which God places in the community of faith so that the whole body may build itself up in love.

The Gospel of John reminds us that this is all about knowing ourselves loved by God and learning to love one another in return. It is about the spiritual quality of God’s people – rooted in the love of God - chosen and called to be the people of God and to do the work of God.

Dom believes in vocation. He has served as Director of Ordinands in the Diocese of St Andrews mentoring people who are exploring God’s call. He has stood at my left shoulder as my Chaplain through many Institutions like this one, through Ordinations and Consecrations of Bishops watching as now in the action of the worship the call of God and our response. He has a strong sense of his own priestly calling and his particular calling to be here in Helensburgh. Dom and I, as he once said to me, are ‘hard core Anglicans’. We are unapologetic about the strengths of the Anglican way in worship, deep thinking, spirituality and a governance which combines democratic patterns with the authority which comes from office.

Clergy are not always kind about one another. But they would be generous in what they would say about Dom. They would talk about his spirituality, his personal spiritual discipline and his ability to open doors for people to new depths of experience of the living God. They might mention that in that sense it is spirituality which is the greatest tool of mission in a secular society. They would mention his work in inter-faith relationships and with students. They would talk about how he took a simple church building and with a few tasteful changes and many tea lights made it a holy place which spoke of worship and prayer. They would talk of hard work, discipline and straightforwardness. They would mention that Dom and Anna together are a formidable and rich partnership in ministry. I might mention his desire always to have a car several sizes bigger than mine

It’s an honour for me to be here today to commend Dom to his new congregation and I thank Bishop Gregor for his gracious invitation. I have often said that the time for appointing a new Rector is when the vocation of the Priest and the vocation of the congregation are aligned. Dom has no doubt of his calling here. In his ministry here, he will lead the congregation to recognise its own calling. He will foster and encourage that calling and the gifts which God gives to go with it. May the time to come be one of rich blessing

Sermon preached by

Rt Revd David Chillingworth

Saturday 4th August 2018