

Chaplain's Assembly – Father Philip Murphy SSC
11th September 2014
“The Church – Mapple People”

Reading: John 15:1-8

Before my talk this morning I would like to mention a few practical matters.

First of all, if you haven't been to it before, our Chapel (your Chapel) is on the eighth floor of the Stewart Building. It is open every school day from before school begins through until about 5.00 pm. You are all welcome to go into it to be quiet at any time, as long as you are not supposed to be somewhere else. At times you may find that I am there by myself saying Morning or Evening Prayer aloud. You are welcome to stay and listen and leave at any time.

Every Tuesday and Thursday at 1.00 pm I celebrate the Eucharist there – the Christian service which Jesus gave us as a way of remembering him, when we take bread and wine and are fed on the body and blood of Jesus. All staff and students are welcome to attend.

So the Chapel is there for worship and quiet prayer. It is a place which we should all treat with respect, and that means that we all have a responsibility to the place.

It is not a place in which to eat lunch, or use telephones, computers, read the paper on anything like that. Although there are instruments in there, it is not a place to practice the piano or other music. I ask those who have been going in to use the piano not to do so anymore. The reason is simple: the Chapel is to be kept as a place of quiet into which any member of staff or student may go to be quiet. If you are playing instruments in there or doing other things in there, it makes other people feel as if they can't use it. Of course there are times when the Praise Group or Christian Union have meetings there or practice their music, but that is done by arrangement with me. So we all have a responsibility to make sure that the Chapel is being used for the right reasons.

Another thing to remind you is that the Chaplaincy does have a Facebook Page – you may have seen the signs in the College – each school day there is a message on there and I invite you to follow it at the address seen on the screen now. There is a link to it in the intranet mail I sent to all students last week, although over 800 of you have still not looked at it. Please do remember to check your intranet messages.

But back to today.

And our theme this week is “The Church”

(Father Philip then showed a short video clip from “The Simpsons.”)

<http://youtu.be/7L2fsubA2-c>

Well I have used that example today because the news, once again, is full of a new product from Apple, another telephone. Each time they launch something new it is almost like a religious ceremony with anticipation, the promise of something new and finally revelation.

In fact Apple, like many other companies, uses many structures and ideas which we find in religion in order to keep a loyal band of followers. They want to have people flocking to their temple or in reality their store.

Like religion, they build large buildings, but these are shops which are almost temple like, a large open space which makes us feel humble when we are faced with so much knowledge.

Like religion, they offer the opportunity to learn more, to share knowledge, to educate their people.

But there is a difference. The biggest difference is that the relationship you and I have with a company like Apple is a direct one-to-one relationship. We pay money to get a product and leave. We do not have a relationship with the other customers, even if they try and make us feel that we do. With the Church, however, there is a relationship with each other.

Yes, in Christianity we build buildings as a destination for people. We build Cathedrals, like our own St John's Cathedral. (By the way, what is a Cathedral?)

A Cathedral is not a large Church, although it may be large. It is a building to house a Cathedra – the Chair of the Bishop. Just like a University talks about having 'Chairs' for those who are leaders in teaching, the Bishop has a 'Chair' a Cathedra, from which he teaches, and the Cathedral is a building to house it.

We build Churches, for local communities, and we call them Churches, where people may go and worship.

We build Chapels in schools, universities, hospitals, nursing homes, army barracks, so that those groups of people may worship together.

But these are all merely buildings. We may call them "The Church" but they are only the Church building.

In the reading we heard today, Jesus described us as branches of a vine. He is the true vine and we are the branches. In other words we are united with Jesus, we are his body here on earth.

So when we talk about "The Church", we don't really mean the building, we mean the people. For we are the Church, we are the branches of the vine. The building is just a place where "The Church", the people of God gather.

Tomorrow morning in our reading at Assembly you will hear a reading about the early Church, the first followers of Jesus some two thousand years ago shortly after his death and resurrection. You will hear about what that early Church did. (Acts 2:42-47).

If you listen carefully tomorrow, you will hear that what the Church did back then was:

- To gather together in fellowship and teach.
- To break bread (to celebrate the Eucharist just as we do in our Chapel).
- To pray.
- To care for those in need.

That is what the Church is. If you wanted to have a quick answer to anybody who wanted to know what the Church was, that would be the easiest answer. Not a building but a group of people who are united in Jesus, who are branches of the vine, and who do these things together.

WE are the Church.