

HOMILY AT RE-OPENING OF BLESSED JOHN DUNS SCOTUS CHURCH, SEPTEMBER 9 2010

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ

You will be just as aware as I am of the growing excitement over the arrival of the Holy Father in our midst less than a week from now. It will be a memorable day for all of us present at Bellahouston Park and for those who will follow the events on TV and radio.

But tonight is for you, the people of Blessed John Duns Scotus Parish, and the Franciscan Friars who have served this area of the city for over 140 years, another red-letter day for we gather to re-consecrate your church after the damage caused by fire some years ago.

When I visit a parish to celebrate with parishioners some notable occasion such as a jubilee or anniversary I like to share with them something of the history of the parish and draw a lesson for the future.

In the case of your parish, I can certainly put my hand on my heart and say that it has one of the more complicated stories within the Archdiocese of Glasgow!

Your story begins – according to one reading – in 1975 when the then-Archbishop Winning opened the new Church of St Luke here in Ballater Street. But in fact the parish of St Luke's dates back a further 70 years, having been founded by Archbishop Maguire in 1905.

Not many of you, I fear will remember that foundation, but I know that some of you can recall with pride the many changes which have come about in the years since this building was opened, 35 years ago.

It was in 1982 that your first big change came about – when your parish was amalgamated with St John the Evangelist's, Portugal Street. The old St John's

was no longer able to be maintained and so your parish numbers were swelled by the influx from that revered old parish.

Eleven years passed and once more your parish absorbed a large and famous neighbour, this time St Francis' Cumberland Street, just a short distance away from here, when it was decided that the Franciscan Church there was no longer viable either.

This change brought with it also a change of name – St Luke's was transformed into Blessed John Duns Scotus ... so not only did you have a complicated history, but you now also had a complicated name!

In recent years, fires have conspired to interrupt the life of the parish and close this building for lengthy periods. As you know, there was a strong hope a few years ago that the parish would be able, once more, to worship in the former St Francis' building in Cumberland Street, a plan which came to nothing after the council withdrew its offer to return the church building to us.

And so, we gather once more, with faith and with gratitude to God, to re-dedicate this re-furbished building to the worship of God.

We do so with gratitude. And tonight I want to publicly express my gratitude to you the parishioners of Blessed John Duns Scotus for your patience and fidelity during these long years of exile from the fire-damaged church which means so much to you, and to the Franciscan community.

I have every confidence that you will treasure this new space with the same pride and care as your forefathers displayed for the venerable parish churches of this area – St Francis, St Bonaventure, St John's and St Luke's.

Your patron is a very apt one for a Church under the care of the Franciscan Order – in two senses he is one of our own ... he is a Scot, a great Scottish theologian to be precise, and he is a Franciscan, a humble follower of St Francis of Assisi. So you should be proud to have his patronage as you look to the future.

The Holy Father himself alluded to this earlier this summer when he devoted one of his Wednesday audiences to the figure of Duns Scotus. As he reminded his listeners: “England received him; France instructed him; Cologne, in Germany, keeps his remains, but he was born in Scotland.”

He was actually born probably in 1266 in a village, which in fact is called Duns, in the borders. Attracted by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, he entered the Family of the Friars Minor and was ordained a priest in 1291. Gifted with a brilliant intelligence — an intelligence that merited him by tradition the title of *doctor subtilis*, “subtle doctor” — Duns Scotus was directed to the study of philosophy and theology at the famous Universities of Oxford and Paris.

As we stand at the cusp of the Papal visit it is worth remembering the great example of loyalty to the Pope given by your patron. At the height of his fame Duns Scotus left Paris when a serious conflict broke out between King Philip IV of France and Pope Boniface VIII, preferring voluntary exile rather than signing a document hostile to the Pope, which the king had tried to impose on all members of religious orders. So — out of love for the See of Peter — he left the country together with his Franciscan Brothers.

If patience is a virtue much in evidence in this great parish, it is a virtue also in evidence among the devotees of Duns Scotus.... who had to wait a long time to see him raised to the glory of the altars. Pope John Paul II beatified him on March 20, 1993, almost 700 years after his death, describing him as “singer of the Incarnate Word and defender of the Immaculate Conception.”

This latter title is due to the fact that Duns Scotus was a powerful advocate of this doctrine of Our Lady. He used the classical Latin formula to argue his case — “*Potuit. Decuit. Ergo Fecit*” God could work this wonder. It was fitting that he did. Therefore he did it”

So you are hewn from a venerable tree!

Your history and that of your heavenly patron should inspire you. As Archbishop of Glasgow I wish to encourage you in the years ahead to frequent this renewed worship space, making it a true powerhouse of prayer and gateway to heaven.

In a few days we will hear again the voice of Peter as we gather to listen to the Pope's message to Scotland. Until we do, perhaps we can reflect on a call made to us by Pope John Paul, the last time a Pope visited our city – a call which is as relevant today as it was then ...

I conclude with his words: "You are the heirs to a sacred heritage. Your forefathers have handed on to you the only inheritance they really prized, our Holy Catholic faith! From heaven their heartfelt appeal to you would be this: "Set your hearts on his Kingdom" (Luke. 12, 31).

Amen to that!