

CONSECRATION SUNDAY 2016

When my brother was clearing out the attic of a house he lived in, he found an old Irish Times newspaper of 1916, and it made fascinating reading.

For example, on the front page was a big advertisement for a 'Maxwell Wonder Car' which you could have for £235! It had 19 improvements on the old model, including detachable wheel rims and lino covered floor boards.

Another selling point was that tyres were now expected to last at least 5000 miles!

There is an ad for Gallagher's cigarettes which are guaranteed to "make a strong fence against all worries" You could buy 10 for 4 old pence.

The Post Office were looking for staff. Female telephonists were starting at 12 shillings a week rising up to one pound, 6 shillings. But once they got married they would have to resign. Tell that to the new Prime Minister!

The musically inclined could buy a new piano for £20. Grey hair could be restored by using Byrd's Celebrated Hair Restorer only one and six a bottle.
How times have changed in the last 100 years!

And how times have changed since this church was consecrated in 1747!

The first St. Peter's, probably founded in the 12th century became derelict and sand-filled on its original site – probably where St. Luke's is now – and so it was decided to rebuild the church on its present site, opposite a coaching inn – part of the Old Vicarage – and many of the old stones from the original church were used, especially as part of the foundations. There's still an old early 18th century chest at the back of the church, and the sun dial from the original church, now standing near the front porch, unfortunately minus the dial.

Many of the Formby family were vicars here and the story is recalled about the Rev Richard Formby of the early 19th century that there was a ship in great distress off Formby Point. It was caught in a very severe storm. The men on the ship had lashed themselves to the mast to prevent themselves being washed overboard.

The news of the disaster was brought to Richard Formby by 5 fishermen. He begged them to rescue the ailing ship but they felt that the storm was too violent and that their lives could be lost as well. Richard Formby, though no sailor, offered to go with them in their boat, and further, offered them a substantial reward if they saved the men on the distressed ship.

They refused the first offer! They would be hard pressed to look after themselves without having also to be concerned about their inexperienced vicar! But they accepted the second offer of a reward, and went to launch their boat, and indeed, did save the crew of the ship, and duly received their monetary reward.

There are still many wrecks off Formby, which led to the establishing of a Lifeboat Station in 1776 – the first of its kind, if not in the world, then certainly in Britain, and it was in operation until 1916 – the same date as the paper I mentioned earlier.

There is a story told about a lifeboat station which is perhaps relevant to us as we celebrate our Consecration Sunday.

It concerns a very simple lifeboat station that was built, like Formby, on a dangerous stretch of coast where shipwrecks were common.

It was at first a simple hut with one boat, manned by a few dedicated volunteers. Many lives were saved by this small station, and it became famous for its rescues.

Many of those whose lives were saved, as well as many locals, gave money towards its work, and new boats were purchased and new crews were trained. Eventually they had enough money to upgrade and extend the original simple building.

Being bigger and more comfortable it soon became a popular gathering place for members, who further improved its décor and provided a lounge. It soon became a club.

More money was raised by members who then decided to hire lifeboat crews for rescue work rather than rely on dedicated local volunteers as before. When survivors from shipwrecks were brought to the new lifeboat station they weren't welcome. After all, they might make a mess of the lovely expensive furnishings that had been bought, and thus lower the tone of the club.

But in becoming a club, the lifeboat station had lost sight of its original purpose, and though it still kept a lifeboat as its motif and in its name, it had ceased to function as a lifeboat station, helping sailors in distress.

Like Jesus in our Gospel story reminding Martha about what was most important, it is easy to get distracted and side tracked from basic principles and what is essential. And it's a danger for churches too. To lose sight of what we are primarily here for.

First we are to worship God, to know Christ and to make him known. And then as his Body on earth we are to be Jesus in our community – serving rather than being served, ministering to others rather than being ministered to. We are called to be the leaven which helps influence and lift the community in which we are placed.

Our Old Testament reading encourages us to look to the rock from whence we were hewn. To look back to our foundation and to measure ourselves against the principles Jesus taught – to love God and neighbour. And this builds on what I said last week based on the Good Samaritan and the importance of our love not just for neighbour who sounds familiar but the stranger amongst us.

Like the lifeboat station of our story we mustn't get distracted and diverted but seek to make this God's community in which his will is done and all are served in his name. This means that we all have a part to play in reaching out to those beyond our walls and welcoming those who venture inside.

We all have a part to play in building on the rich heritage of past generations who worshipped here. And the responsibility that future generations will be able to look back and say yes this generation of ours truly served God in word and action.

The prayer of Ignatius Loyola is a fitting conclusion:-

Teach us Good Lord to serve you as you deserve,
To give and not to count the cost;
To fight and to heed the wounds;
To toil and not to seek for rest;
To work for you and to ask no other reward,
Save that of doing your will;
For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.