

# AMPLEFORTH COLLEGE EXHIBITION MASS 2024

This is a significant moment.

It is an important moment because this is a moment in the academic year when the College pauses to give thanks for the many blessings and opportunities that have arisen. Tomorrow at Prize Giving there will be an occasion to acknowledge, with gratitude, the achievements, over the past year, of individuals. But this is also a significant moment before many continue with public examinations and some of you will begin to say goodbye – before you start a whole new chapter of your life. Exhibition, therefore, marks a moment of real transition.

Words of Dag Hammarskjold came to mind. He was at one time Secretary General of the United Nations. His aeroplane mysteriously crashed while on a peace keeping mission to the Congo in 1961 and not long before that fateful journey he said: “*For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be ‘Yes’.*” Here are the sentiments with which we enter this celebration, not just of this Mass but also this Exhibition weekend. Take time to say thank you. Thank you for all that has been while you have been here in this valley. The things you have learnt, the friendships you’ve made and the qualities and abilities that you’ve discovered. Whatever your feelings and thoughts are as you approach the completion of your time in the College, this place will have had its influence, it will have left its mark.

St Bede, whose Feast it is tomorrow and whose prayers we are asking this evening, was very clear that the search for meaning and purpose, the need to find direction and values are essential to the human endeavour. As a Benedictine monk, Bede knew that the scriptures and our encounter with God in prayer provide us with purpose, principles, people and power. The Word of God that we have just listened to has presented us with this clear guide: The first reading from Ecclesiasticus reminded us:

*“...the scholar will be filled with the spirit of understanding...words of wisdom...He will grow upright in purpose and learning.”*

You have learnt many things over these years at Ampleforth College, but the underlying purpose of this College is not simply to fill your heads with information, important as that can be. Information might make life more manageable, but it does not always give you a reason to live, it does not always add quality to life and wisdom is not measured by intelligence. Bede was hungry for learning, not for prestige or honours, but so that he would be able to live life to the full. To live life according to its ultimate purpose.

You have lived here surrounded by a community of Benedictine monks, some of whom you have got to know, others were simply figures at a distance. Monasteries exist for no other purpose than to point to something unseen and beyond themselves. We are or should be – a place where people discover that there is more to life than what can be touched, tasted, or seen. My hope is that you have had that experience, and that you have become aware that life has a purpose, greater than the one you may choose to create for yourself.

The Gospel we heard this evening is alerting us to this very reality. It poses the crucially important question: *What contribution will I make to the world around me?* The principles of the Gospel that you have encountered in the retreats, masses, homilies, discussions that you have engaged in while being in this valley have all been aimed at empowering you to answer that question. *What differences will I make, what values, attitudes, beliefs will shape my choices?* The world is as it is not by accident, it is as it is because people choose to shape it in this way rather than another. Are you choosing to do what is true, beautiful and good? Without genuine principles we aimlessly make history – a history that can lead to confusion, despair, emptiness and unhappiness. Why did Bede write his history? So that we could know where we came from, so as to see clearly where we wanted to go.

The purpose and principles that God has put before us from the beginning is that we live in relationship, we are not made for isolation. You have lived at close quarters here with others and while that will have had its tensions, community has also been essential in shaping your character and abilities. Whatever life brings it will bring you into contact, as the Rule of St Benedict says, with people of different characters and abilities, people of different temperaments and backgrounds. Learning to negotiate and celebrate difference is a life skill that is indispensable. Having lived in community from an early age St Bede knew that the support and challenge of others helps enable both spiritual and human maturity.

We have a purpose to live for, principles to live by, people to live with and we have, through the presence of God, a power to live from. Hence, we can with confidence because of the formation in faith that you have received here, we with confidence say thank you for all we have received and we can say ‘yes’ to all that will come our way in the future.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

24 May 2024