

Head Monitor’s Speech

Exhibition 2024

Seamus Stainton

When Mr Roberts asked Josie and me to speak today, he simply asked: ‘Why do you love Ampleforth?’ A daunting question to be tasked with answering, but I know that my fellow Upper Sixth students have been reflecting on it since the thought of leaving this Valley became a stark reality, for some a reality that is only hours away.

So what ***is*** great about Ampleforth? Mass; the scenery; life in houses; lessons; sports; music; theatre. Everyone’s answer is different, but I think there is one thing we can all share an appreciation for: the relationships that are formed here. We often talk about the ‘***Valley fever***’ which can set in at the end of a long term, with 400 teenagers confined to one shop, one school pub and so on; the Valley can seem quite narrow. But the apparent constraints imposed by the limits of this isolated valley are precisely what encourage the young people here to become so close to one another. I wonder whether there are any friendships quite like Amplefordian friendships. They are, I think, something that springs from the Benedictine heart of the community that is Ampleforth. St Benedict asks us to ‘listen with the ear of our heart,’ and this is what lies behind so many successful Ampleforth friendships. No matter who you are, there will always be someone to talk to here, someone who will listen to you. This was something we all missed very much during Covid, when we couldn’t be here, and life in the world outside the Valley seemed (ironically) more constrained and isolated than ever.

The love embodied in these relationships is not a privilege that is reserved to the student body alone. We are all members of the Ampleforth community: parents, siblings, teachers, members of the monastic community and anyone else who has a connection to the School. It is great to see a stream of OAs, parents and others visiting the Valley on many a weekend throughout the year,        and feeling at home here. True, we do talk about ‘Valley fever’, but we also say that, ‘You never ***quite***leave the Valley.’ Emotionally and spiritually, people are drawn back here.

Here and now, I would like particularly to thank all Ampleforth parents for the way in which you stuck by the School when the temptation to do the opposite must have been powerful. Your support through the turbulence, and the way you held firm with us, set us on the path to a new, brighter future.

Exhibition is a moment to celebrate and give thanks for all that has gone so well this year, and I’m sure that today more than ever this valley will be filled with love and appreciation. And rightly so.