

JUBILEE ADDRESS

GIVEN BY FATHER JUSTIN AT THE LUNCH FOLLOWING
THE FAMILY MASS CELEBRATED AT ST. HELEN'S CHURCH,
WESTCLIFF ON SATURDAY, 22nd JULY 1967

TABLE DECORATIONS IN FRONT OF THE JUBILARIAN INCLUDED A FRAMED
PAPAL BLESSING : HIS ORDINATION CHALICE : A SILVER COMMUNION PLATE.

Present at the lunch were the brothers of Fr. Justin, Jim (& Lily); Ray (Rosie was indisposed); Flip (& Gertrude, from Canada). The sisters of Fr. Justin, Isabel, Veronica and Anita. Isabel's children (Mary & Joe, and six children) (Margaret & Alex with Catherine and Sarah - John was at camp) (Derek & Margaret, and three eldest - Simon, Fiona and Nicola) (Anne & Ken, with Elizabeth and Clifford). Jim's children (Laurie & Stella, with five children) (Ann & Frank, also five) (Betty & Douglas, with two) (Michael & Brenda, with their baby). Vincent and Eileen were unable to be present, but their children were, viz. (David and Patricia with baby Joanna) (Nicholas and Pamela). Also present were Jack Benson, Leonard Brown, Lilian Evans (Nannie), Adelaide Cross and Mary Brown.

My dear brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, grand-nephews and grand nieces, and dear friends:- Underneath the base of this chalice is inscribed "To Dom Justin Dawson, O.S.B. on his ordination, Feast of Saints Peter & Paul 1942 from his devoted friend John O'Connell". and thereby hangs a most intriguing tale spanning well-nigh half a century. Let us go back then, a quarter of a century, to 1917 when World War I had another terrible year to run. I was still at school, but my elder brother Jim was in Palestine getting ready to join in Lord Allenby's victorious march to Jerusalem and on to Damascus. Jim's unit kept to the coastal strip from Kantara and Gaza northwards to Haifa, so he missed seeing the Holy City which was to feature so prominently in my own life later on.

At this time our eldest brother Edward was in Montreal where he had emigrated in 1912, the advance-guard of a whole stream of Dawsons who went to Canada for various reasons and various lengths of time. Ray was the first to join Ed in Montreal, but he returned before World War I broke out and went east to Malaya and in 1917 he was in the Indian Army in Lahore. The next emigrant was Flip who joined Ed in 1916 and is now a Canadian of over fifty years standing. Adrian was in the army in England while Sebastian was already fighting in Flanders. After the war in 1919 Ed paid his first of many return visits over the years, and took Isabel back with him for a short stay. In 1920 Sebastian went to Montreal and after being there for a time went to Toronto, where he has been ever since. In 1925 Adrian went to Montreal and eventually to Toronto where he remained until his death in 1954.

In 1927 Veronica joined the westward flow, but returned after a couple of years. In 1939 Edward's Margaret came to England for a holiday and when she returned to Canada Mother went with her, at Edward's invitation, for a long stay to enable her to see

all her children, grand-children and first greatgrandchild - and World War II nearly prevented her from getting back to England. During the war itself Laurie was in Canada for part of his training in the R.A.F., and Vincent, also in the R.A.F., made a very hush-hush crossing in the warship which took Winston Churchill to the historic rendezvous with President Roosevelt. Years later, in 1961, Anita caught up with the rest of us and had a well-deserved holiday in Canada and the States, and in 1964 Betty and Douglas with their two boys, called at Toronto and Montreal on their way home from the States. Thus, apart from our own father who never went abroad but was always hoping to, and who died in 1916, Jim is the only Dawson of our generation who has not visited Canada.

I was still at school at Farnborough on Armistice Day, 1918, and I remember the heroes of the old Flying Corps taking up their Bleriot-type kites, fitted with some of the original Ford claxon-horns, and swooping low over the roof-tops and firing Very-lights and making an awful din with their hooters. The following year I was at St. George 's College Weybridge, where Derek's son, Simon, was to follow me some forty-eight years later. My next move was to St. John's Seminary, Woneresh, to try my vocation to the secular priesthood for the comparatively new diocese of Brentwood. After three years in the Junior Seminary I managed to pass the London Matriculation, but instead of going on to the Senior Seminary, I decided, (mistakenly as it turned out) that the priesthood was not my vocation. This presents us with another great "if" of history! If I had not then interrupted my journey to the altar, where or what might I be now? Suffice it to say that one of my contemporaries is now the Administrator of Southwark Cathedral and another is its Archbishop!

So for the next two years I was a City Gent, complete with bowler-hat and rolled umbrella, during which time I took a night-course at the London School of Economics and sat at the feet of Professor Hugh Dalton who later became a not very distinguished Chancellor of the Exchequer. I also became a member of the Honourable Artillery Company and left my mark, as did Jim and Adrian, on the ancient Regimental Register - in vellum - if nowhere else. My brief military career included the thrill of firing a royal birthday-salute from the Tower of London, and being tossed head-first from one of the Guards' horses during riding practice. And now the wander-lust which, as you have seen, is a characteristic of the Dawson Clan, began to bite, as it bit Vincent after me. I could not face the prospect of sitting on the lowest stool in the accountants' department of the Union Assurance Society opposite the Royal Exchange, waiting for dead men 's shoes. Fortunately a most unusual opening abroad soon presented itself. Since his school-days at Erdington Abbey, near Birmingham, Jim had kept in touch with the famous Benedictine author, Dom Bede Camm O.S.B. (from whom Laurence gets his second name), who, at this time was at Cambridge and one day Jim heard from Dom Bede that there was a vacancy in Jerusalem for an English teacher at the Opera Cardinal Ferrari College. I applied for the job and, because there was no other applicant, I became Il Professore d' Inglese.

So in 1925, at the ripe old age of twenty-one, I set out on my travels which were to keep me on the move for the next ten years. My appointment to Jerusalem arrived on a badly-written postcard in broken English after the September term had started, so on the strength of this document and with Jim's assistance in the shipping world of London, I signed on as a super-numerary "wireless assistant" on the first available boat which turned out to be the small 4,000 ton 'Clan Macintosh'. The Captain was an old salt of the old school because he retired to his cabin with a bottle just outside the three-mile limit and emerged some few days and a thousand nautical miles later. I knew he was still alive because

when we ran into some very dirty weather in the Gulf of Lyons a valuable instrument slid off his desk on to the floor and through the thin cabin wall I could hear a stream of swear-words which were quite new to my young ears. I was expecting the ship to go down at any moment and praying for a happy death at the time.

Palestine was under the British Mandate at this period and the Department of Education was organised on English lines so that although all the boys at the Ferrari College were Palestinian Arabs, both Christian and Moslem, the general teaching language was English and my job was to try and diminish the amount of pidgin in the spoken word and to raise the tone generally. I remember I wore an undergraduate's gown and grew a moustache in order to lend a little verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing appearance. I also remember that even in those far-off days there were one or two shifty Egyptian masters on the staff. It was not long before my presence in the Holy City became known to the Catholic wife of Colonel Symes, Chief Secretary to the Governor, Lord Plumer. Lady Symes, as she became a few years later, asked me to give private lessons in my spare time to her two children, Barbara aged 11, and John who was 7. This is where Lilian enters my story because she was their Nannie and many were the good times we all had together with picnics and tea-parties. This is also where Sir John Connell appears on my little stage and our friendship began which was to lead to my chalice here. He was a brilliant lawyer well-known in Dublin and Cork and also a distinguished man of letters now retired and travelling in the Middle East to try and live down the pain of separation from his dearly-beloved wife recently deceased. I became his guide and friend, while he remained the philosopher, and we took our time visiting the Holy Places at which his humility and devotion were most impressive. He was a very small man but with a noble cast of features of the classical Roman style. I remember on one occasion we were visiting the Dome of the Rock and while we were putting on the big floppy slippers necessary before a Christian can enter a mosque, a Moslem "holy-man" completely unknown to either of us came up to me and asked whether my companion was not a famous lawyer. On another occasion he teased me by asking why I did not become a priest instead of, as he put it, galivanting around the Middle East. A few years later Sir John entered the Beda in Rome - the seminary for late vocations - and before long was himself ordained a priest. I wrote congratulating him on having followed the advice he once gave me.

By the year 1929 it became clear that the tension between the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine was near breaking-point and I was lucky enough, with a bit of wire-pulling, to be offered a job in Egypt before the fighting broke out. So I became a civil engineer - more civil than engineer, I'm afraid - helping to build a barrage across the Nile in Upper Egypt as a subsidiary irrigation scheme connected with the great High Dam at Aswan. (I learnt later that my successor at the Ferrari College in Jerusalem was Fr. Conrad Walmsley O.F.M., the elder brother of one of my first class-mates and the son of my first headmaster at St. George's, Walthamstow). This job in Egypt was the most romantic I ever had and although I knew nothing about civil-engineering, I used to stride about the scheme armed with a walking-stick (symbol of authority) - and a ruler - (symbol of brains) - and pitch my innocence against the biggest bunch of rogues, the local Greek and Armenian sub-contractors. Thus for a couple of years I was able to enjoy the respect and security which a British passport conveyed, as it has ceased to do for some time now. During the long quiet leisure evenings I was able to write a book on "the shape of things to come" which included World War II, still ten years away. Malta and Cyprus were to be in the front line in the West: a parallel of latitude was to be the front line in the East (as later in Korea and Vietnam). China was to over-run the Far East, including Malaya - but I was a bit wrong here, it was the Japs who were to do this as Ray was to find out in due course when they swept him into their net and kept him a prisoner in Changi Jail for over three years. I also included in my Wellsian-style story a plan whereby the

Middle East was to be secured as a sphere of permanent British interest in which the Gulf of Akaba, so recently in the news, was a prominent feature. Incidentally this plan would have forestalled all the trouble there has been and will continue for some long time to be, in the Middle East.

When the Nile barrage at Nag Hammadi was completed I found myself back in England with a few pounds in my pocket; no job; and a manuscript in which nobody was interested. For the record I would like to recall that as I wrote each chapter I posted it to Anita who would type it for me, so that at least I had a presentable typescript. However, the nineteen-thirties were hard times for publishers, as for everyone else, so for a year or two I had the double heart-break of no offers for the book and no opening for a worthwhile job. It was at this juncture that Ed came to the rescue with an invitation to Montreal. Dawson Brothers, with Jack Benson here as auditor and financial advisor, had reached its highest point of expansion with its original head office, warehouse and store on Notre Dam Street: a larger store on St, James' Street, with a small branch half way to the Uptown shopping area, and finally the most spacious stationery store in Canada on the ground-floor of the Dominion State building. Unfortunately the great depression of the thirties seemed to follow me across the Atlantic and by degrees business became harder to get and in the end the stock-market all but collapsed, with a piling up of bad debts in Jack Crawford's accounting department. This low ebb in the business world together with the fact that I was now pushing on to the age of thirty, goes a long way to explain why I was unable, like my older brothers, to take root in Canada. The moral seems to be for you younger folk, if you are going to emigrate, start young and try and hit the full tide of expansion rather than the ebb-tide of a business depression.

When I got back to England in 1935 the flags and bunting were up on Southampton Docks not for my return, but for King George V's Jubilee. My globe-trotting was nearly over but I still had a couple of years vainly searching for a niche in which to settle. The only jobs available seemed to be salesmen and I am quite sure that salesmen are born and not made. I could no more sell ice-cream to a Zulu than I could sell insurance to a shop-keeper. And then one day Vincent and I went for a weekend retreat to Worth Priory and the retreat was conducted by Dom Hubert Van Zeller, O.S.B. This somewhat unusual name, in England at least, rings a bell in the family story which sounded before I was born. The Van Zellers lived at Woodford Green when our family was there at the turn of the century; and it was through Dom Hubert Van Zeller that I made my way to Buckfast Abbey in 1937. Vincent drove me down a road and we stopped on the way at Alton to see Uncle Ern and Aunt Helen. It was the last time I saw Uncle Ern, but Auntie Helen was able to come to my ordination at Buckfast in 1942. In spite of World War II I was fortunate in having ten of the family present on that memorable day. Our mother, without whom I would never have reached the altar, had by the grace of God returned safely from Canada in 1940 and was able to come down to Devon with Veronica and Anita. Isabel too, in spite of losing Ralph in 1939 managed to bring her children with her, Mary, Margaret, Derek and Anne. Vincent was able to come over from the R.A.F. hospital in Torquay, still in calipers after his air crash in Scotland. Of the rest of you here today, the only other one at my ordination was our friend, Mary Brown. Incidentally I was ordained on the 29th June, which happens to be also Flip's birthday. I had already written to Sir John O'Connell, now the Rev. Sir John, to tell him of my impending ordination and to apologise for having taken fifteen years to follow his advice - or was it premonition? At this time he was attached to Westminster Cathedral and our friend, Leonard Brown here often had the privilege of serving his mass. He was delighted at my good news and offered to supply me with a chalice so, war or no war, this beautiful chalice arrived from the Goldsmiths' Company in London with Sir John's compliments and best wishes.

The War continued to build up to its terrible climax and more and more Canadian and American Forces were stationed on British soil. In 1944 the family suffered its only mortal casualty when our nephew, Richard, in the Royal Canadian Air Force was killed while on active service. It was a grievous loss for Flip and Gertrude to bear, but we like to think that almighty God has made it up to them in other ways. Considering how many of the family were in the Forces and others in the thick of the London bombings, our losses might well have been more.

Although at the Abbey we were relatively free from physical danger, we were more and more caught up in the turmoil of the times. A continual stream of refugees from the Continent made their way to Buckfast; more and more individuals came to us seeking moral and spiritual rehabilitation; army chaplains needed retreats and refresher-courses; a boys' school bombed out of Plymouth sought refuge within our walls; and during all this time I was the Guest-master always on call. No wonder that when it was all over I was thoroughly run down and was sent to St. Augustine's Abbey in Kent to recuperate. It was here that I had my first real taste of parish work, being appointed eventually as priest-in-charge of St. Anne's Church at Cliftonville. So instead of returning in due course to the cloistered life of Buckfast I was released by Rome from my monastic vows and joined the Archdiocese of St. Andrews and Edinburgh as a secular priest. There was already a family link with Scotland because our mother had been a pupil at St. Catherine's Convent, Edinburgh, in the eighteen-seventies and it was to the same city that she and Dad came for their honeymoon in 1888. They were married at St. Wilfrid's, Blyth, on May 1st and sixty-two years later their seventh son (who was born on May 1st) was a curate in the parish adjoining St. Catherine's. After nearly a year in the City I was moved out into the country to Broxburn where I spent fourteen happy years the highlight of which was the Broxburn Centenary in 1962. This was the period during which I was able, at the expense of St. Christopher Tours, London, as Spiritual Director, to take parties of pilgrims to Lourdes several times, to Belgium, Switzerland, Oberammergau, and twice to Rome to see Pope John and Pope Paul. Many of you here today were with me on some of these exciting pilgrimages. I was even able to re-visit the Holy Land, both Israel and Jordan, in 1961 and to say mass at those Holy Places which I knew so well as a young Layman in the mid-twenties. It was also from Broxburn that I went to say the funeral mass of our mother in 1953, and with Veronica and Anita, lay her to rest beside Dad in the beautiful garden cemetery at Ventnor in the Isle of Wight.

So finally I come to the most intriguing link in my wanderings of a lifetime. How amazing to think that the First Lady of this small and somewhat remote village of Falkland, where I was privileged to keep my Silver Jubilee of ordination, should be the little girl, Barbara, to whom I gave lessons in Jerusalem over forty years ago. Her father, Sir Stewart Symes, had proceeded up the Colonial ladder from being Chief Secretary in Palestine to being Governor in Aden and then Tanganyika and retiring as Governor General of the Sudan. Her brother, John, was a Major in World War II and was killed over France while seconded to the R.A.F. on a dam-buster type of operation. Barbara herself joined the Volunteer Nursing Service in the Middle East and it was there that she met and married Major Michael Crichton Stuart, Hereditary Keeper of Falkland Palace. He was one of the leaders in the Desert Patrol operating behind the German lines in North Africa and was later badly wounded at Anzio during the invasion of Italy. After the war they came back to Falkland and set up house in the ancient Stuart Palace of Falkland because the traditional family home of Falkland House, with some ninety rooms, was far too big to run under post-war conditions. The Palace had not been a family home since Charles II stayed there in 1650/1 and was partly restored by Major Michael's

grandfather, the 3rd Marquis of Bute, from 1887 onwards, and it took many years to restore the living quarters and furnish them in becoming style. The Chapel Royal (the only Royal Chapel in the United Kingdom to have the Mass) naturally shared in this process and is now completely restored to its former magnificence under the Stuart Kings and Queens of Scotland. It is here that I celebrated my Jubilee mass on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, using my own ordination chalice. The gold chalice belonging to the Chapel Royal itself was brought by the third Marquis in Naples during a visit in 1882 and bears the date 1690. The ciborium still in regular use is dated 1714; and the monstrance was given by Major Michael's father, Lord Ninian Crichton Stuart, (who was killed in France in 1917) and is dated 1908. To complete this valuable collection of church plate I thought it fitting, on your behalf, to present the Chapel Royal with this solid silver communion plate, bearing my own jubilee date of SS. Peter and Paul, 1967, - and I hope it is still in use there during many centuries to come.

As this rather long and rambling story, with its abundance of historic dates, is intended primarily for the younger generations, it is fitting to conclude with a nursery-tale. After two disappointments in founding a family of their own during the strains and stresses of the war in which they were both so actively engaged, Barbara and her husband decided, soon after returning to Falkland, to adopt two baby girls. Who more capable of nursing them than the Nannie who had held Barbara herself at the font? So Lilian here was brought out of retirement to start all over again. She really didn't know what she was letting herself in for, because, after a few years, the wonderful thing happened and Barbara presented her husband with a daughter of their own, and then to crown everything and give the story a real fairy-tale ending, there followed a son and heir to carry on their branch of the ancient Stuart line. Thus when I came at last to Falkland one of my happiest tasks was to teach young Ninian his catechism as I had taught his uncle John in Jerusalem some forty years previously. Ninian and his sisters are now at boarding-school in England and Lilian has retired once more - this time for good - and we both live across from the Palace in one of Major Michael's houses, built by Nicoll Moncrief in 1610 under James VI, keeping an eye on the children when they are home on holiday, and in the tranquility of old-age gazing perhaps more often into the years that have gone, rather than attempting to penetrate the problematical future. It is the beginning of another story not for us, but for them. Whether there is a moral in my own story I would not care to say, but one thing seems to me quite clear, that during all the vicissitudes of the past half-century the hand of Divine Providence is there for all to see.
