

Sermon Summary
2nd of Advent/ Feast of Consecration
4th December 2011

- We are increasingly reminded that the church is about people, not buildings.
- We are lucky. Our church building has no expensive architectural features. It is small and functional.
- How might we celebrate a feast of consecration, when the emphasis has moved from the building to the people?
- We might do worse than consider John the Baptist- and what he does as a model for how a church building might function.
- First John is a witness to someone else, not an end in himself. Church buildings often become the ends when they are meant to be a means.
- John is a witness. Our church is a witness to the Other for those who drive or walk past purely and simply because it is not a house on a suburban plot. Its very difference is a prompt to a different set of values.
- Its sign board, remarked on by many, also makes people think.
- Groups who use the church hall cannot but notice that the presence of the church also indicates something other than the ordinary.
- If people come inside, the design of the church should be a nudge to an alternative way of thinking about how the world works, exemplified by the font, the altar and the tabernacle. It sets off triggers about the presence of God.
- In some churches, the smell of incense is also a powerful sensory trigger.
- Above all, the church should have an atmosphere. We are more sensitive to these than we might admit. We all have experienced walking into an environment where we can sense the tension or difficulties in a relationship.
- Generations of people who pray give a church an atmosphere, something that can be sensed- and what it should give is a sense of peace, and sense of the presence of the God who loves, forgives and transforms.
- A church building should be a witness to the otherness of our Christian claims about God, felt tangibly, allowing those who enter the experience of being loved and accepted by God.
- In so doing, it is a means to an end, a witness to a new reality, a challenge to the status quo of contemporary materialism and empiricism: it is a reminder that there is more to the world than can simply be seen in material terms. It is where the barrier between heaven and earth becomes thin (Genesis 28:17; John 1:51), and God may be encountered.

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