

Diamond Jubilee Celebrations  
1893 - 1953

## II. IN RETROSPECT

At this time of Jubilee it is natural that a lively interest is shown in the history of the parish, so that we may understand the trials and difficulties which beset our parents and grandparents in their endeavours to bring it to the flourishing community we know today. Perhaps the best -- and certainly the most accurate -- résumé of the history of St. Joseph's, Tollcross, is contained in the sermon delivered by Monsignor Ward, our Vicar General, at the Solemn High mass of Thanksgiving. It is here reproduced verbatim.

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In the Old Testament we read that Almighty God ordered the people of Israel to set aside each fiftieth year as a year of jubilee; a year of rejoicing at the liberation of the Chosen People from the bondage of Egypt; a year of thanksgiving for their entry into the Promised Land. It was also to be a year of remission of faults, a year of grace and pardon. In Christian times our Holy Mother the Church has followed the example set by Almighty God for the people of Israel and she declares a Jubilee each 25 years as well as on other special occasions -- a time of special prayer and rejoicing, a time when the faithful flock to the feet of the Vicar of Christ in Rome, there to obtain grace and pardon in the many indulgences granted. In the life of a Parish it is right too that there should be a celebration of Jubilees; that we may rejoice at and give thanks for the blessings of the past, and renew our faith and strengthen our hope and confidence for the future. In this Parish of St. Joseph, Tollcross, it was not possible in 1943, because of the serious illness of the late Archbishop, to celebrate the Jubilee in the manner you would have wished, although a modest celebration was held at Easter the following year; and gladly has the opportunity been taken of celebrating the Diamond Jubilee ten years later in a manner befitting the occasion, when you welcome your Archbishop to preside at and share in your rejoicings; and with him so many other distinguished clerics, including the Bishop of Paisley, one of your very own, as the Celebrant of the Mass of Thanksgiving.

At a time like this our thoughts naturally turn to the past, to the days of your parents who pioneered in the building up of this now flourishing Parish. The district here was originally part of St. Paul's Parish, Shettleston, which itself had been cut off from St. Mary's, Abercromby Street in 1857, less than a hundred years ago. It is an indication of the flourishing growth of the Church that at that time it was said that one bench in St. Mary's could accommodate all the Tollcross Catholics. With the development of the Clyde Ironworks the population of the district increased so much that in 1874 the Parish Priest of Shettleston, the late Canon McBrearty, found it necessary to build a school for the accommodation of the children of Tollcross and district. He obtained a site on mere nominal terms from Mr. Smith Sligo of Inzievar and Carmyle, a most generous benefactor of the Mission, and a small school was erected. In 1893 the number of Catholics had grown to such an extent that Archbishop Ayre made Tollcross into a separate Mission under the Rev. Edward Doody. And so the Mass came to Tollcross. More ground was added to the original feu, and a large Chapel-School and a priest's house were built. While the building was in progress Mass was said in the small school. Father Kirk came in 1894, and on 16th June, 1895, to the great joy of the faithful, the chapel-school was opened by Archbishop Maguire, then the auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop Ayre. A few, very few, of the older parishioners, will remember with gratitude that happy day, but most of those who took part in the ceremony have gone to their eternal reward. May they rest in peace.

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The Mission continued to increase and prosper, the people, who were poor, working hard with their priest to shoulder the burden of debt that had been undertaken in order to provide them with Chapel and school. They were content to have both Church and School in their midst. No doubt they hoped that at some future date they would be able to provide a more worthy Church for the celebration of the august sacrifice of the Mass. But in 1904 disaster came to the Mission. On the 10th of June of that year the new Chapel-School, less than ten years old, the very centre of the lives of the people, together with the old school which had been converted into a hall, was destroyed by fire caused by a spark from a passing locomotive. We can well imagine the thoughts in the hearts of the people. There was consternation at the sudden nature of the tragedy; there was sadness at the grievous nature of their loss; but there was no despair. With holy Job they were able to say, "The Lord giveth; the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." They still had their priest, and with him they set about to repair what had been shattered. Gone in one night were their dreams and visions of the great Church they had hoped to build. Now their condition was worse than it was before the old chapel-school had been built. They had no place in which to worship God; their children had no school. Hand in hand with the building of a Church must come a School where their children could be educated in a Catholic atmosphere. And so it was decided to build a new Chapel-school. Throughout that summer the people assisted at Mass each Sunday and holyday in the open air. A temporary wooden structure was built and for two years it served the purpose of both Church and school. But their plans went ahead for something greater. Another site was obtained at a distance from the railway to avoid a repetition of the tragedy. And on it was built this present Chapel-school. It was opened on the 28th October, 1906 by His Grace Archbishop Maguire, and at the time it was the envy of all the schools in the district, and even judged by modern standards it is still a worthy and suitable building for its purpose.

It will be noticed that in the history of the parish Church and School have always been closely linked together, and in this we see the importance places by the Church and by Catholic parents on the Catholic education of their children. If the children are well instructed in the truths of holy religion, if they are properly directed in the paths of virtue, the future of the parish is ensured. The wisdom of that policy has been amply proved. Under the self-same roof as Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar the children of this parish have been brought up. They have come to look on Our Blessed Saviour as their constant companion in their childhood days. And the benefits of that are to be seen all around us in the life of the Parish. With such a background it is not to be wondered at that you have brought all your devotion to bear on the decoration and adornment of the altar on which for so many years the Sacrifice of the Mass has been offered to the greater honour and glory of God and for your own benefit and that of your dead.. Here in this Church have been gathered together all your hopes and aspirations; here your joys and your sorrows have been offered to God with the spotless Host in Holy Mass. It is to be expected that as a result of Church and School being so closely linked together there should be in the hearts of the parishioners here a great love of the Mass. It is the very centre of Christian worship. By the Mass we are enabled to adore, praise and thank God in a manner fitting His infinite dignity. No matter where it is offered -- let it be amidst all the splendour of St. Peter's in Rome, or in the open air or in the poor wooden building which served your fathers in their time of tribulation, it is the same august sacrifice offered by Our Blessed Lord on the Cross at Calvary. Surely we have reason to rejoice that the Mass here in your midst for the past sixty years.

And in looking over the years we think of the countless other blessings for souls that have come through this parish; of the thousands of children who have been regenerated in the

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cleansing waters of Baptism and introduced to the life of grace and made members of the Church. Here too they have been anointed with holy Chrism in Confirmation and have been set aside and sealed and marked as perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ. You have been fed here with the Bread of Angels in the Holy Eucharist, your souls nourished and strengthened with the very Body and Blood of Christ. The repentant sinner has found here mercy and pardon in the Sacrament of Penance, together with grace and courage to arise and sin no more. Your marriages have been blessed at this altar that you may have all the actual helps required to enable husband and wife to love and be faithful to one another and to bring up their children in the fear and love of God. Here the word of God has been spoken to you -- "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." The seeds of vocations sown in the home have been fostered before this very tabernacle, and you have been privileged to see your own sons raised to the dignity of the priesthood and offer Mass here in your midst before setting out on their apostolic task of saving souls. Your daughters too have learned here the ineffable sweetness of leaving all things to follow Christ.

It would be unpardonable to omit on an occasion like this mention of that powerhouse of prayer that has grown up in the midst of your parish, where the good Sisters of Charity devote themselves with such love to the service of the poor and afflicted of Christ. Surely from their prayers and example all will benefit, and some may be inspired to devote themselves to the life of Religion.

For all these reasons we must give thanks to God to-day. "Lift up your hearts," says the priest at the Preface of the Mass. In truth we can say, "We have lifted them up" in joy and gratitude to God. But in our gratitude to God let us not forget those who were the instruments in His hands -- your good priests who led and inspired you, Father Doody, Father Kirk, Father O'Sullivan, Father Horgan, already gone to their eternal reward -- May they rest in peace -- Canon McCarthy still happily with us, Canon Dennehy at this moment suffering from serious illness, and your present priests, together with the many assistant priests of the past, both living and dead. It is our duty to remember them all in our prayers. For all those who helped to build up the life of Christ in your midst, for the example of those great men and women, your parents who struggled and made heroic sacrifices for your sakes, you should give thanks and you should pray. You are now enjoying the fruits of their labours, their sacrifices and their prayers. You would be false to your heritage if you were to neglect their example, if you were to be lukewarm in your faith, if your hearts were not to burn with love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, for His Holy Mother and for Holy Church; if you were to sit back and rest on their laurels and not prepare now for the fulfilling of their dream of long ago, the building of a Church, when building restrictions are removed, for the more worthy celebration of the sacred mysteries. May St. Joseph, your holy patron, the protector of the Universal Church, guide you in such a happy purpose, protect you in all your parochial life, and bring you all safe to the bosom of the Holy Family in the glory and happiness of heaven.