

HOMILY BY THE BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

The Bishop of Chichester dedicates The Cottage Hospice and Chapel at Five Ashes Mayfield on Thursday 5 December.

Those who live in Five Ashes know just how busy the main road is. As it runs through the village, cars, vans and lorries hurtle down the hill and you feel that you are taking your life in your hands as you try to reverse onto the road.

This busy, scary thoroughfare on which you have developed the first ever Cottage Hospice reminds me of the story of another busy, scary road. It's the main road between Jerusalem and Jericho and the setting for the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Not long ago when I was in the Holy Land on pilgrimage with people from the diocese of Chichester, we visited the Monastery of St George in the Wadi Qelt. The monastery is built into the cliff on a deep ravine that runs from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Here, where Jesus locates the famous story of compassion, hope and healing, one is now confronted by a place of praise and worship. It sits, hauntingly in the silence of the desert, allowing time to assimilate the gospel story that has become the defining image of response to human need.

The establishment of this Cottage Hospice, on a busy road, and on the site of a church dedicated to the Good Shepherd, draws from the profound insight of that gospel story. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd is also the Good Samaritan. He is the outcast who brings hope; he is the stranger who does not turn away from human pain and death but steps forward to embrace it.

Like the monastery of St George, itself a place of spiritual hospitality for the pilgrim wearied by the damage of this world, you have provided this Cottage Hospital with a sacred space that is at the centre of its life.

This chapel, an abiding reminder of the inspiration of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd and the Good Samaritan, is a provision of spiritual hospitality for those whose spirits are worn down by fear and grief.

The Cottage Hospice in Five Ashes is a beacon of hope on a busy road. It is a place where we are invited to bring those in need of care, and where we who care for them are also offered refreshment, dignity and hope. This is a holy place where in the depth of human life we can discover the love of God, seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

May all who pass this way discover the love and hope that are the healing work of the Good Shepherd who brings us ultimately to heaven, into the Father's house, where each beloved child of God is seen in the perfection and beauty for which we were made.

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