



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

PARISH VISITATION DEANERY OF BANBURY & WARWICK

Parish of Blessed Robert Grissold, Balsall Common. [236]

Parish of St Francis of Assisi, Baddesley Clinton. [52]

Visitor: Canon Paul Fitzpatrick
Priest in Charge Fr. Frank Smith

Date of Visitation: 28/29 October 2023

Summary of Visitation Activities:

Date 28 October 2023

Meeting with Fr Frank Smith.

Meeting with the Parishioners of Blessed Robert Grissold, Balsall Common.

Celebrate Mass: Saturday 6pm, Baddesley Clinton.

Visit to the Hermitage – Meal and meeting with Sr Felicity.

Sunday 19 February 2023

Celebrate Mass: Sunday 9.30am, Blessed Robert Grissold, Balsall Common.

Celebrate Mass: Sunday 11.00am, Baddesley Clinton.

Meeting with the Parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi, Baddesley Clinton

Conversation with Fr Frank Smith and Mrs Sandra Smith.

A brief profile of the Parish.

The parish Blessed Robert Grissold, Balsall Common is canonically part of the parish of St George and St Theresa, Dorridge. However, for several years it has acted independently with its own Priest in Charge. In 2014 Fr Frank Smith was appointed Priest in Charge of Balsall Common. On the retirement of Fr John Sharpe in 2020, Fr Frank was appointed Priest in Charge of Baddesley Clinton.

Parishioners at Blessed Robert Grissold have acted in a co-responsible fashion for many years, particularly with the planning and building of their new Church in 2001. They have been used to a large degree of responsibility and leadership, in every part of parish and liturgical life.

After the pandemic this has changed, which is true of many parishes. The Parish Council has not met, and certain responsibilities have been curtailed. In turn the parishioners have suffered a loss of morale. The parishioners have not reacted well to the liturgical changes

that Fr Frank has introduced. Many have complained to Fr Frank & Canon Paul Fitzpatrick. Several have left the parish. This is also true of the parishioners of Baddesley Clinton.

Prior to the visitation, Fr Frank has had a meeting with the parishioners of Blessed Robert Grissold. This was a difficult meeting as frustrations were expressed and no compromise was found. However, the opportunity for talking together and listening to each other, is itself positive.

In this context, the two parish meetings which took place during the visitation were significant. In each case a synodal methodology was employed.

The Parish Meeting

The aim of the parish meeting was to discuss the implementation of the Diocesan Vision: *'Our vision is to be a Catholic Diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour'*.

Blessed Robert Grissold. Balsall Common.

On Saturday afternoon, Canon Paul Fitzpatrick gave a presentation on the Diocesan Vision. It was noted that five parishioners had recently attended a meeting in Bicester, on the Diocesan Vision. Each parish was asked to send two representatives, Balsall Common was the largest single group. It was also noted that Fr Frank Smith was not present.

Forty parishioners attended the meeting, which was the majority of the parish congregation. They were engaged and listened carefully to the presentation. Over the course of the 90-minute meeting, everyone had an opportunity to speak. Only two persons did not.

The parishioners began by praising the devote manner in which Fr Frank celebrates Mass. However, they feel that there are a number of issues which need to be addressed if the parish is to thrive.

The lack of communication was the major issue for all. Decisions were taken without any explanation or consultation. Often communication was not possible after Mass, because Fr Frank was rushing off to Baddesley Clinton. Several parishioners would prefer to have a little extra time with Fr Frank on a Sunday.

The cancelling of the music group was a particular issue. The music group is now allowed to play once a month. Outside of that, the choice of hymns was an issue for some, and the frequency by which music was repeated was also an issue.

As one parishioner expressed. 'there is a lack of joy. This is now missing, which was once at the heart of the celebration of Mass'. Many of those at the meeting, agreed.

Another concern for all, was the number of parishioners who no longer attended Mass at Blessed Robert Grissold and went elsewhere. Canon Paul noted that he had received several emails from parishioners echoing their reflections, and notifying him, that this is why they were leaving the parish. Those at the meeting felt that things had to change, as the parish is declining. They felt that when the parishioners had more responsibility for parish life, the sense of community was stronger.

Parishioners would like to see the Parish Council reintroduced and a push for fresh membership. As there is no resident priest in the area, the parishioners take responsibility for the day-to-day care of the Church and its grounds, as well as being keyholders, and the hire and care of the parish hall. They do not always feel appreciated, for the work they undertake.

St Francis of Assisi. Baddesley Clinton.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick gave a presentation on the Diocesan Vision. It was noted that four parishioners had recently attended a meeting in Bicester, on the Diocesan Vision. Each parish was asked to send two representatives, between these two parishes there were nine representatives.

There were seventeen parishioners present, at the meeting after the Sunday Mass. Here the atmosphere was positive. Those present recognised that they were a small community. However, they had sought to encourage parishioners to get to know each other better, by having Coffee mornings, and other social events. They felt that they owed much of their cohesion and identity to the presence of Sr. Felicity, who was greatly appreciated.

Parish Masses and Liturgy

Canon Paul celebrated Mass in each of the Churches. He was struck by the beauty of St. Francis of Assisi. The congregation were warm and friendly and there were a number of younger families present.

Blessed Robert Grissold has very good facilities and is well cared for. The Music Group were present at Mass and made a positive contribution to the liturgy.

It is not clear from the website and the newsletter when Mass is celebrated regularly. Mass is celebrated on Thursday morning at Baddesley Clinton. Parishioners at Blessed Robert Grissold noted that Mass is often cancelled at short notice because of Fr Frank's family obligations.

Canon Paul was surprised that an extra Mass was celebrated on All Souls day, but there was no extra provision on All Saints Day. It would be difficult to attend Mass on this Holy Day of Obligation. This was a strange decision.

Parishioners would wish to have the offertory procession reintroduced, that the missalettes be re-introduced, which were helpful for all, especially those non-Catholics who attend Mass. That the ministry of the extra-ordinary ministers of the Eucharist be re-established.

Affirmation of Parish Life

The parishioners of Blessed Robert Grissold and St Francis of Assisi, care deeply for their Church and parish community. They have a sense of co-responsibility for the parish and would wish to do more. They recognise that the effect of the pandemic has been significant. The numbers at Mass are only 70% of that in 2019.

This is a lively and deeply committed community who continue to support the life of the parish community.

Finally, I should like to express my thanks to Fr Frank Smith for his hospitality.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick

15 October 2023.