



# Homily

## for the 400th Anniversary of St Isidore's College in Rome

16 November 2025 – XXXIII Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear brothers and sisters,

*May the Lord give you peace!*

Today's Gospel sets before us a striking paradox. Jesus and his disciples are admiring the temple in Jerusalem – those magnificent stones, those splendid decorations. Yet Jesus says: "All that you see here – the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

And still, here we are – celebrating four hundred years of these very stones, these walls that Luke Wadding claimed for the Irish Franciscans in 1625. Are we contradicting Jesus?

Of course not. The real question is: what kind of memory are we celebrating?

The prophet Malachi gives us an answer. He speaks of destruction – a day "blazing like an oven" when the proud will become stubble. But he also promises: "For you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays." Not the stones of a building, but the light of God's justice – a light that heals, that gives life, that keeps rising from one generation to the next.

And that, dear friends, is what we celebrate today. Not primarily these walls, but a living story – a story that still unfolds, a light that still shines.

In 1625 – exactly four hundred years ago – Luke Wadding took over this unfinished convent with a clear vision: not to build a monument, but to create a home where faith and learning could continue to grow. A place to form young Irish Franciscans when their faith was being persecuted at home. A place where the Gospel could be lived in the Franciscan way, and handed on to new generations.

And how that story has unfolded! St Isidore's became not only a seminary but a centre of Franciscan scholarship. Wadding's library was renowned throughout Europe. When you entered this church, you saw Irish saints with verses in Old Irish from the year 800 – a clear message: "Our story continues. Our mission is not finished."

This, too, is what Jesus means in today's Gospel: "You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."



The stones may fall – and they did fall. French troops occupied this place, looted its treasures, even melted the bells for bullets. But the story did not end. It continued – through perseverance, through faith. Blessed Charles Meehan, who studied here, was martyred in 1679. Five other friars gave their lives for the faith. Their witness became part of this same story – proof that, as Jesus said, not a hair of your head will be destroyed.

And St Paul, in the second reading, gives us the key to keeping this story alive: “Do not grow weary in doing good.” That is how we carry the story forward – not through nostalgia, but through mission; not by clinging to the past, but by letting it live and speak to the world of today.

Brothers and Sisters, upstairs in the aula, there’s a fresco from 1671 showing the friars at their desks, studying and writing. If you look closely, you’ll see an empty chair at the table. That chair is an invitation – a place kept open for each new generation, calling us to take our place, to continue the story.

Today, that chair awaits us. The question is not, “How do we preserve four hundred years?” The question is, “How do we continue this living narrative?”

We continue it by staying faithful to the Gospel. By persevering in doing good, as Paul urges us. By letting the sun of justice rise again and again with healing in its rays, as Malachi promised.

We continue it by remembering who we are – Franciscans. Next year we will mark eight hundred years since the death of Francis of Assisi – not as a distant commemoration, but as part of this same living story. Think of Francis’s Testament, written in his final days: *“The Lord gave me brothers... No one showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High Himself revealed it to me.”*

That is the heart of the story – how God continues to work, how the Spirit continues to guide. For eight centuries, the Franciscan story has remained alive and open, speaking to new generations. These four hundred years of St Isidore’s are part of that greater narrative: following Christ in the way of Francis – with joy and humility, with love for creation and compassion for the poor, with scholarly excellence and humble service.

And so, we continue – by looking forward. These four hundred years are not the conclusion but a new chapter. We trust the same Spirit who inspired Francis, and who inspired Luke Wadding, is still at work among us today.

Let us give thanks – for Luke Wadding’s vision, for all who have lived and worked here, for the martyrs and the scholars, for the Irish friars and for the international community who now carry the mission forward.



But above all, let us give thanks for the story itself – the living story of faith that that continues, that transforms, that speaks to each generation, that cannot be destroyed because it is not made of stones but of the Holy Spirit working in human hearts.

Jesus was right: not one stone will be left upon another. And he was right again: “By your perseverance you will secure your lives.” The true temple is not made of stone, but of living faith – faith handed on from generation to generation, from Francis to Wadding to us, and from us to those who will come after.

May the sun of justice continue to rise over this house, with healing in its rays. May the story continue. And may we have the courage and the joy to write our chapter well. Amen.

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*Minister General*