



## ST ALBANS SCHOOL

### Example Assembly

I am guessing that sitting amongst us this morning are a number of people asking themselves a question. For some that question may be, "What does today have in store?" For others it could be, "Will I be picked for rugby tomorrow?" Perhaps some of you are even wondering, "What's for lunch?" the answer to that one is probably fish and chips! But sitting here, now, in this magnificent, medieval building some of you could well be thinking, "Why meet here?"

It's a good question, and it deserves a reasonable, thought-out response. Until that comes, here are some introductory pointers. I would suggest that we meet here for a mixture of historic, cultural, educational and spiritual reasons. Of course, there will be some who come here purely because they have to, but then the reasons for that imposition are historic, cultural, educational and spiritual. So, let's deal with each of these suggestions in turn.

First, the history of our School is bound up with the history of this Abbey. The School owes its origins to the Abbey, probably being founded in the 900s by one of its Abbots, which makes ours one of the oldest schools in England.

However, while it was run by the Abbey, it wasn't a school for monks, but rather to ensure that those who might offer themselves to serve God in this way would be suitably educated first. So, for example, Nicholas Breakspear, the only Englishman to be made Pope, was told, when he tried to become a monk at this Abbey that first he needed to continue with his schooling.

During the Reformation the last Abbot worked hard to ensure that the School was not dissolved along with the monastery, but instead might continue for the education of boys from the town. And so, for the next three hundred years the School met in the Lady Chapel, at the opposite end of the Cathedral to where we are sitting now. The School only moved to its present site in the Abbey Gateway in the nineteenth century – which seems a long time ago to us, but if the history of the school was compressed into your time here, it represents only one year out of seven!

So, through meeting here we can remember our roots, and give thanks for the long history of the relationship between the School and the Abbey.

Secondly, gathering together in places like this still forms part of our cultural heritage. Religion is not just a thing of the past, a relic of a bygone age, nor has it simply shaped our present society, though this could be reason enough to take part in assemblies, as we seek to understand how faith in God has influenced the world we live in.

This building is not a living museum and what you will experience in this Abbey is not a re-enactment of the past, but a celebration of what many people in our country still believe and hold dear. Indeed, each and every Sunday about a thousand people will pass through the doors of this Abbey because they want to pray to God, sing to God, listen to God, meet with God. People come here to worship for other reasons too: such as weddings and funerals, civic occasions and private prayers.

The worship of God has had a profound effect on history and literature, philosophy and science, art and music. And we are privileged not only to come to a building that is so visually impressive, but to be able to listen to an excellent school choir sing in a setting so fit for music and accompanied by a magnificent and fully restored organ. Coming here for our assemblies on Mondays and Fridays gives you the chance to join in, or simply observe, the worship of God for yourselves.



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Thirdly, and in a way I have already touched on this, we come for educational reasons, to learn something more about our world and ourselves and beyond, to examine what we believe and don't believe. There will be times when you disagree with something that is said or done, and, if you want, you can always find me to talk about it, I don't mind being challenged or criticised.

Throughout this term we are going to be looking at the subject of worship, we will be thinking about what worship is, why people worship God, how they worship Him, when they worship Him, and whether it makes any sense or difference to worship God.

Finally, I hope that some of us come for spiritual reasons, because in this place, and during our assemblies, we have the chance to stop and think, to listen and pray, to have our hearts lifted by the music, to find the time to give thanks to God for the week gone by, or ask His help for the week ahead.

I hope that you will find coming here not a burden, but a blessing, and that what the Psalmist says about his frequent visits to the Jewish Temple in the ancient city of Jerusalem may be true of your more frequent visits to this Abbey Church for our assemblies together:

*I was glad when they said to me,  
'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'*

The School understands that it may not be appropriate for every student to attend Assemblies in the Abbey, and an alternative programme of assemblies is arranged for them on the School site. Everyone is expected to attend our Act of Remembrance in November and the Founders' Day Service of Commemoration in July.

Jonathan Gillespie, Headmaster