

# newdirections

November 2013

£2-50

serving Catholics and Evangelicals seeking to renew the Church in the historic faith

## Love has the primacy in Christ's Body

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet on our vocation  
and the importance of Christian love

*Also in this issue:*

- The English Clergy Association
- Terence Grigg considers the role of the parish church
- The Society of Mary



# parish directory

**BEXHILL on SEA St Augustine's, Cooden Drive, TN39 3AZ**  
Sunday: Mass at 8am, Parish Mass with Junior Church at 10am. Further details: Father Robert Coates ssc on 01424 210785

**BIRMINGHAM St Agatha, Stratford Road, Sparkbrook (B11 1QT)** "If it is worth believing in, it is worth travelling for" Sunday Mass 11am. Secure Parking. Canon John Herve ssc - 0121 449 2790

**BISHOP AUCKLAND St Helen Auckland, Manor Road, West Auckland** Medieval church, *Forward in Faith*, ABC. Sunday: Sung Mass 10am, Evensong and Benediction 6pm. Weekday Mass: Mon 7pm, Tues, Thur, Fri, Sat 9.30am, Wed 10am, Rosary Mon 6.30pm. Parish Priest: Canon Robert McTeer ssc 01388 604152 [www.sthelenschurch.co.uk](http://www.sthelenschurch.co.uk)

**BLACKPOOL St Stephen on the Cliffs, Holmfield Road, North Shore ABC, Forward in Faith, SSWSH Parish.** Vicar: Canon Andrew Sage ssc. Sundays: Said Mass 9am, Solemn Mass (Traditional Language) 10.30am, Evening Service 6pm; easy access and loop. Tel: 01253 351484 [www.ststephenblackpool.co.uk](http://www.ststephenblackpool.co.uk)

**BOSTON LINCOLNSHIRE St Nicholas, Skirbeck** Boston's oldest Parish Church. *Forward in Faith* Parish under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Richmond. Sunday: Low Mass 8am (1st and 3rd), Sung Mass 9.30am. Daily Mass, offices, benediction and confessions as displayed on notice boards. Rector: Fr Paul Nobless 01205 362734 [www.forwardinfaithlincs.org.uk/stnicholasboston.html](http://www.forwardinfaithlincs.org.uk/stnicholasboston.html)

**BOURNEMOUTH St Ambrose, West Cliff Road, BH4 8BE.** *A Forward in Faith Parish, Resolutions ABC in place.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass BCP, 10am Sung Mass Traditional Ceremonial, 6pm Evensong (not Aug) 3pm Nov-Mar. Tues: 10.30am Low Mass, Fri 8am Low Mass. Parish Priest: Fr Adrian Pearce ssc 01202 911569; Parish office 01202 766772. Email: [stambrosechurch@btinternet.com](mailto:stambrosechurch@btinternet.com)

**BOURNEMOUTH St Francis of Assisi, Charminster Road (corner of East Way)** *A Forward in Faith Parish* under the care of the Bishop of Richmond. *Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass, Parish Mass 10am, Evening Service 6.30pm - first Sunday of each month. Parish Priest: Fr David Wastie [www.stfrancis-bournemouth.org.uk](http://www.stfrancis-bournemouth.org.uk)

**BRADFORD St Chad, Toller Lane** (B6144, 1 mile from city centre). Sunday services: Low Mass 8.30am, Solemn Mass 10.45am, Evensong and Benediction 6.30pm. Weekday Masses 8am (except Wednesday 7.30pm and Thursday 9.15am). Parish Priest: Canon Ralph Crowe ssc 01274 543957. *Resolutions ABC.* English Missal/BCP [www.st.chads.dial.pipex.com](http://www.st.chads.dial.pipex.com)

**BRIDPORT St Swithun** *Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: Low Mass 8am; Sung Mass 9.30am, Evening Prayer and Benediction second Sunday 6pm. Weekday Masses: Tues 12 noon, Wed 9am, Thur 10am. During interregnum please contact the Revd Duncan Wilson on 01308 420651

**BRIGHTON WAGNER GROUP The Annunciation** (11am) Fr Michael Wells 01273 681431. **St Bartholomew's** (11am) Fr. David Clues 01273 620491. **St Martin's** (10am) Fr Trevor Buxton 01273 604687. **St Michael's** (10.30am) Fr Robert Fayers 01273 727362. **St Patrick's** (10.30am) Fr Steven Underdown 01273 747889. **St Paul's** (11am) Fr Robert Fayers 01273 727362. (Sunday Principal Mass times in brackets.)

**BRISTOL Christ Church, Broad Street, Old City Centre BS1 2EJ** *Resolutions ABC.* Sunday 11am Choral Eucharist, 6.30pm Choral Evensong with Anthem and Sermon. Georgian gem, Prayer Book services, robed men and boys' choir, Renatus Harris organ. Tues, Thurs and major holy days: 1.05pm Eucharist. Regular recitals and concerts (see website). During Interregnum contact Roger Metcalfe, Churchwarden on 01275 332851 [www.christchurchcitybristol.org](http://www.christchurchcitybristol.org)

**BRISTOL Holy Nativity, Wells Road (A37), half a mile from Temple Meads Station** *A Forward in Faith Parish, Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: Solemn Mass and Junior Church 10am, Friday Mass 10.15am.

Priest in Charge Fr Christopher Kinch 01179 712 496

**BROMLEY St George, Bickley** Sunday: Low Mass 8am, Sung Mass 10.30am. Daily Masses: Mon 7.30am, Tues 9.30am and 7.30pm, Weds 10am, Thurs 9.30am, Fri 9.30am and 6.30pm, Sat 9.30am. Times of Confession and other information from Fr Owen Higgs on 020 8467 3809

**CARDIFF near rail, bus, Millennium Stadium, city centre and Bay** Daily Mass **St Mary, Bute Street** Sunday: Solemn Mass 11am; **St Dyfrig** and **St Samson, Pentre Gardens** Sunday: Solemn Mass 9.30am. Parish Priest: Fr Graham Francis 02920 487777. Associate Priest: Fr David Morris 029 2221 2177

**CHARD The Good Shepherd, Furnham.** *Resolutions ABC* Sunday: Sung Mass 9.45am, Solemn Evensong and Benediction (3rd Sunday only) 6pm. Weekday Masses: Tues 10am, Wed 6.30pm (with Healing and Reconciliation on the 4th Wed of the month). Contact: Fr Jeff Williams 01460 419527 [www.churchofthegoodshepherd-chard.weebly.com](http://www.churchofthegoodshepherd-chard.weebly.com)



WEDNESBURY: Ss James and John

**CHESTERFIELD St Paul, Hasland, Derbyshire** Sunday: Sung Mass 9.45am (Family Mass 1st Sunday), Evening Prayer 3.30pm. Masses: Tues 7.15pm (Benediction last Tues of month), Frid 12 noon, Sat 8.30am. **St James, Temple Normanton, Chesterfield, Derbyshire** Sunday: Parish Mass 11.30am, Thur: Mass 7.15pm. Fr Malcolm Ainscough ssc 01246 232486

**COLCHESTER St Barnabas Church, Abbott's Road, Old Heath, Colchester** *A Forward in Faith Parish. Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: Sung Mass 10am. Weekday Masses: Mon 6pm, Tues 10am, Thur 7pm, Holy Days 7.30pm. Check website for other daily services [www.stbarnabasoldheath.wordpress.com](http://www.stbarnabasoldheath.wordpress.com) Vicar: Fr Richard Tillbrook ssc 01206 797481 [fathercap@hotmail.com](mailto:fathercap@hotmail.com)

**DEVIZES St Peter's, Bath Road, Devizes, Wiltshire** *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Exeter. All resolutions passed.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass (BCP), Fourth Sunday only: 10am Sung Mass, Thurs: 7pm Low Mass. Mass on major festivals and Saints Days - times vary. Contact during interregnum: Mrs J Hosie, Churchwarden 01380 813500

**EASTBOURNE St Saviour's** *A Forward in Faith Parish with Resolution ABC.* Sunday: Low Mass 8am, Solemn Mass 10.30am. Daily Mass and Office. Details and information from Fr Jeffery Gunn 01323 722317 [www.stsaviourseastbourne.org.uk](http://www.stsaviourseastbourne.org.uk)

**FOLKESTONE Kent, St Peter on the East Cliff** *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Richmond.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass, 10.30am Solemn Mass. Weekdays - Low Mass: Tues 7pm, Thur 12 noon. During Interregnum - tel: 01303 254472 [www.stpeterschurchfolkestone.org.uk](http://www.stpeterschurchfolkestone.org.uk) - [stpetersfolk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stpetersfolk@yahoo.co.uk)

**GRIMSBY St Augustine, Legsby Avenue** Lovely Grade II Church by Sir Charles Nicholson. *A Forward in Faith Parish under Bishop of Richmond.* Sunday: Mass 9am, Parish Mass 10.30am, Solemn Evensong and Benediction 6pm. Weekday Mass: Wed 9.30am. Contact Mr T Jones 01472 871673

**HARTLEPOOL St Oswald's, Brougham Terrace.** *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Beverley.* Sunday: Sung Mass 9.30am, Benediction 6pm. Daily Mass, Offices and Confessions as displayed. Parish Priest: Fr Graeme Buttery ssc 01429 273201

**HEMPTON Holy Trinity (near Fakenham, Norfolk).** ABC, FIF. The Church on the Green. Visit us on the way to Walsingham. Mass on Sundays and Wednesdays at 10am. Linked to the Shrine of OLW. Parish Priest: Fr Lockett ssc 01328 820030

**KINGSTON-upon-THAMES St Luke, Gibbon Road (short walk from Kingston railway station)** Sunday: Low Mass (English Missal) 8am, Sung Mass (Western Rite) 10.30am, Evensong and Benediction 5pm. 3rd Sunday each month: Teddy Bears Service for pre-schoolers 9.30am. Wed, 7pm Exposition, 8pm Mass. First Sat of the month, 11.15am Mass of Our Lady of Walsingham. For further information phone Fr Martin Hislop: Parish Office 020 8974 8079 [www.stlukeskingston.co.uk](http://www.stlukeskingston.co.uk)

**LEAMINGTON SPA St John the Baptist** *Parish under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Exeter - all resolutions passed.* Daily Mass. Sunday: Low Mass 8am, Parish Mass 9.30am, Solemn Evensong and Benediction (1st Sunday only) 3.30pm. Traditional Catholic Worship in a friendly atmosphere. Parish Priest: Fr David Lawson ssc 01926 422208 [www.fifparish.com/stjohnleamington](http://www.fifparish.com/stjohnleamington)

**LIVERPOOL St Agnes and St Pancras, Toxteth Park (FIF & ABC)** Sunday: Parish Mass 10am; Solemn Evensong and Benediction 6.30pm. Daily Mass. Sunday School. Glorious J.L. Pearson Church, with modern catholic worship, good music and friendly atmosphere. Parish Priest: Canon Christopher Cook ssc 0151 733 1742 [www.stagnes.org.uk](http://www.stagnes.org.uk)

**LONDON EC3 St Magnus the Martyr, Lower Thames Street (nearest Tube: Monument or Bank)** *Resolutions ABC.* Mass: Sunday 11am, refreshments following. Tues, Thur and Fri 12.30. Visitors very welcome. [www.stmagnusmartyr.org.uk](http://www.stmagnusmartyr.org.uk) Fr Philip Warner [rector@stmagnusmartyr.org.uk](mailto:rector@stmagnusmartyr.org.uk)

**LONDON N1 Holy Trinity, Hoxton** Sunday: 10am Solemn Mass and Sunday School. Midweek Services: contact Fr Andrew Newcombe 020 7253 4796

**LONDON N21 Holy Trinity, Winchmore Hill.** *A Forward in Faith, Resolution A, B & C, modern catholic parish.* Sunday: Every Sunday: Said Mass 9.00am and Sung Mass 10.30am with Junior Church. Weekdays: Tues to Fri 12 noon Angelus and Mass. Saturday Mass 10am. For the Sacrament of Reconciliation and other enquires contact Fr Richard Bolton at [rdeb2010@btinternet.com](mailto:rdeb2010@btinternet.com) or phone 0208 364 1583

**London NW9 Kingsbury St Andrew** *A FIF Parish under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Fulham* Sunday: Mass at 10am. Tube to Wembley Park then 83 Bus to Church Lane. Parish Priest: Fr John T Smith ssc 020 8205 7447

**LONDON SE13 St Stephen, Lewisham (opposite Lewisham Station)** *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Fulham.* Sunday: Mass 8am, Parish Mass 10am. Weekdays: Mon 10am, Tues 6.30pm, Wed 12.15pm, Fri 6.30pm, Sat 10am Parish Priest: Fr Peter Hudson 07908 640369

**LONDON SE16 St Mary Rotherhithe, St Marychurch Street SE16 4JE** *A Fulham Parish.* Sunday: Solemn Mass 10am, Evening Prayer 6pm, Benediction monthly. Mass times: Tues 12 noon; Wed 10am School Mass; Thur 6pm; Fri 9.30am; Sat 9.30am. Tube: Jubilee Line Bermondsey/Canada Water/Rotherhithe Overground. Visitors most welcome. Fr Mark Nicholls ssc 0207 394 3394 [www.stmaryrotherhithe.org](http://www.stmaryrotherhithe.org)

**LONDON SE18 St Nicholas - the Ancient Parish Church - St Nicholas Road, Plumstead.** *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Fulham.* Masses: Sunday 8am; Solemn Sung 11am; Mon 8pm; Tues 7.30pm; Wed 9.30am; Thur 7pm; Fri 12 noon; Sat 10am. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament half an hour before every Mass apart from Sunday. Modern rite, traditional ceremonial. Parish Priest: Fr Andrew Stevens 020 8854 0461

**LONDON SW1 St Gabriel, Pimlico** Sunday: Mass 8am; Sung Parish Mass 10.30am. Midweek Mass: Tues 7pm, Wed 7pm, Thurs

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"Here again and keeping going."





## LEAD STORY

# Love has the primacy in Christ's Body

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet preaches about the challenge of building the Church in love.

**‘W**e should try to live in such a way that if the Gospels were lost, they could be re-written by looking at us.’ These words of a famous Russian archbishop, Anthony Bloom, capture what at this point I want to say to you, as I, like St Augustine of Canterbury before me, jump out of the boat and stand for the first time on Ebbsfleet beach.

### An unfamiliar shore

We can imagine him, chilled to the bone, standing on that unfamiliar shore, shivering as much at the prospect of the mission ahead of him as at the wind-driven rain behind him, saying to his Benedictine brothers: ‘Brothers,’ and history doesn’t record any sisters foolhardy enough to make the trip, ‘this won’t be easy; but we should try to live here in such a way that if these Gospels that we have brought with us on our journey are lost, they could be re-written by looking at us.’

Well, we believe that Gospel Book was not lost, and is safely conserved in Cambridge. Nonetheless the Gospels that arrived under Augustine’s arm on Ebbsfleet beach that day remain every bit as much in need of being embodied in us if the world is to see and to believe.

‘If the Gospels were lost, they could be re-written by looking at us.’ In that brief sentence we can touch what the Church is: not an organisation, not an association for religious or humanitarian or secular purposes, but a living body; limbs and mind and heart, a community of sisters and brothers in the body of Jesus Christ, who unites us all in himself. To experience the Church in this way, almost to be able to touch with our hands the power of his truth and love, is a huge gift; a source of great joy and courage when many speak only of the loss of the Church’s attractiveness and the shortening of its reach.

### An incomparably precious gift

In this body, love has the primacy; only where love is given and received is the kingdom of God is seen and felt. It is an incomparably precious gift, without which we would be dead in our sins. Jesus taught his hearers that this kingdom of love is like the precious discovery of hidden treasure or a pearl beyond price. When it is glimpsed and recognized for the incomparable fortune it is, the wise choice is to leave everything, sell everything, to get hold of the kingdom, to gain the greatest possible blessing.



the  
treasure  
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and  
a challenge  
to our  
thinking:  
to  
rethink  
love



As Paul says: 'For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ' (Phil. 3:8). Again, Jesus said it's like a mustard seed or leaven, it has inner strength and potential; it is in the nature of the kingdom to grow dynamically and unseen, from small beginnings. 'We are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been made manifest' (1 John 3:2; cf. Col. 3:3, Mark 4:27); all this, but only when love is what circulates around the body, when love is what is exchanged, when love is the cause of our Eucharist and our service. The body of the Church, says St Paul (Eph. 4:15): 'builds itself up in love.'

### Constant challenge

That is why it is our constant challenge, one we often fail abysmally: to give love the primacy in the Church's life; for love to be the currency we give and receive. God's love is not a 'love' like ours, a love for people like us; not something completely bound in with our identity and belonging. It perseveres when it's not returned; it's lavishly poured out on people who are unlovable, and in case you were wondering, 'unlovable' here is not them, it's us; it's un-deflected when it's rejected. God's love for the world is astonishing, without cause, totally free, and awesomely unreasonable; and it's what we are invited daily by Christ to be part of, sharing in his Spirit by the gift of his body and blood.

So, the treasure we have discovered turns out to be both the thing we most long for, and a challenge to our thinking: to rethink love, rethink our belonging, rethink the capacity of the body of the Lord. Instead of saying: 'These are the people who belong with us, these are the people who are like us, so they are the ones we will like and who will like us,' we are compelled to say: 'we've got to go out.' We have got to find more ways of belonging with the people who don't belong; people who may be estranged from us, fear us, or are hostile to us, and draw them into the catholic body of Jesus, the embodiment of that astonishing, inexhaustible, causeless love. That, to mention the bishop for a moment, is where the episcopate comes in.

### Guardianship of the faith

Each ordained ministry is the sacramental presence of Christ ministering to his whole body: the deacons, endowed with the spirit of service; the priests, endowed with the spirit of sacrifice; the bishop, endowed with the spirit of oversight. The bishop is there to be a witness to the resurrection of Christ and the motivating force of Christ's love for all, in and through the body of his disciples; the bishop is there to ensure that love has the primacy in Christ's risen body.

The tools of his ministry are the presidency of the Eucharist, the guardianship of the faith, the assignment of ordained ministries: but all these things converge on one ministry: to remind his brothers and sisters constantly of the primacy of love; love for God, love for one another, love for the body of the Lord, love for 'the other', love for the world he died to redeem.

I believe that at this point when a new pastor has been added to the Lord's Church, two in fact today, as we must pray for Bishop Martyn Snow too, we need to be reminded that the Church is an article of our faith. Without it, despite its obstinacies and divisions, despite the sins and infidelities of its members, our salvation would be impossible; this infinitely precious, wounded-yet-risen Body is worthy of our adoration and witness.

At a time when we're aware of the great responsibilities that lie ahead of us, the challenges that present themselves; when we are very aware of what obedience to the Lord may require in an uncertain future; we need to remember always the primacy of God's love in us: 'we should try to live in such a way that if the Gospels were lost, they could be re-written by looking at us.' **ND**

*Homily given by the new Bishop of Ebbsfleet at Benediction at St Alban's Holborn, 25 September 2013, attended by clergy and people from the Ebbsfleet parishes and others who had attended the ordination earlier that day in Westminster Abbey. This homily is based on the Gospel passage read at the Ordination Eucharist and at Benediction: Matt. 13:31-33, 44-45*



Bishop Jonathan Goodall SSC receives a pectoral cross from the Provincial Master of the Society of the Holy Cross

at a time  
when we're  
aware of  
the great  
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# Under the seal

Thomas Seville CR reflects on the seal of the confessional

In my community, only one member has been imprisoned while a brother. The story is simple and also salutary. The brother was in the Community's priory and living in South Africa in the days of apartheid, a system which he had opposed steadfastly. A member of the ANC, a proscribed organization, came seeking refuge and they talked; the fugitive was in great trouble. He left, but was followed closely by the security police who arrested our brother and tried to compel him to tell what he had heard. He refused and was brought before a court and he still refused to speak; the brother who has but lately gone to his rest was not given to much chat. He was sent to prison for contempt, for refusing to break confidentiality.

## Secrecy under threat

The principle of confidentiality, of things legitimately kept secret is under some pressure in contemporary society. Paradoxically, this is taking place at a time when surveillance of citizens by the state has reached an extent without precedent. I would suggest that there are three principle reasons for the decline in respect for the keeping of confidentiality. First, the idea of people who either are privileged to keep matters secret or are obliged to and moreover out of obedience to God is something which has become hard to understand, let alone respect. Second, figures such as ministers of religion have lost much of the standing which was once theirs in public life. Lastly and probably most significant is the impact of the awareness of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults, sexual and otherwise, and especially by clergy. The standing of churches in this regard, with some reason, is not now a good one.

The heightened attention given to ensuring the safety and welcome given to the vulnerable is welcome; the provision of training in such areas, the employment of safeguarding officers and the development of guidelines to help parishes and clergy and other workers may be properly seen as penitence for past failings and now as part of the mission of the church in the name of Christ. Attention is given to the position of confidentiality in the work of clergy and in particular the hearing of confessions. Confidentiality is precious, but how much more so in the context of confession (the brother above was not hearing; if there was something worth going to prison for then, how much more so in the case of the confidentiality of a confession). However, one may note a different slant in recent guidelines from that given in the *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* issued by York and Canterbury ten years ago.

## Absolute confidence

Noting the regard to be had to confidentiality in general pastoral encounters, the older document is forthright about the confidentiality to be observed in the ministry of

reconciliation. Even after the death of the penitent, matter cannot be disclosed. The priest may not refer to matter learnt in the confession unless permission is given by the penitent. Absolution may be withheld. Regarding the abuse of children and vulnerable adults, the priest should encourage the reporting of this to the relevant authorities and, should make its performance a condition of absolution or even withhold absolution. This is clearly applied to those accusing themselves of such sins, not to victims where the issue is often to be the reception of forgiveness and acceptance by God. The obligation to confidentiality remains however, even 'if a penitent's behaviour gravely threatens his or her well-being or that of others' (7.4). The *Guidelines* add notes referring to the famous Canon 113, based on the canon of Lateran IV (1215), which binds confidentiality on the confessor, under pain of being deprived of office. This remains church law, though it has not been recently tested in the civil courts

and its status is therefore far from certain.

Some recent diocesan guidelines, reflecting the need to report abuse, while acknowledging the obligation to confidentiality in the confessional, however, make recommendations

which modify it. In one such set, the priest is advised, in the case of withholding absolution, presumably if the penitent is not willing to report the matter to relevant authorities, to tell the bishop and to seek advice. Although the set is hedged with a condition on the consent of the penitent, it does seem to amount to risk qualifying the seal. If it has always been regarded as a breaking of the seal to identify a penitent, it is hard to see how seeking advice can be accomplished without risking disclosing the penitent's identity, unless great care is taken, and this is not advised explicitly. The way this particular set of guidelines refers to the uncertain state of Canon 113 and absolute confidentiality is also markedly different from those of the Archbishops; in these the tone is concessive, almost as if its possible being 'inconsistent with civil law' (I quote) is something not unwelcome in this context. The legal position is described as 'doubtful' rather than the more accurate 'uncertain' of the earlier and still current *Guidelines*.

More troubling is the assimilation which may be here remarked to the ministers of the gospel being a part of a general safeguarding culture. That something like this is a social good may be recognised, and good safeguarding practices will be embraced happily, no doubt, but the confessor is not there to be a social worker, still less a police officer. The music a priest sings is as George Herbert once put it, 'another music', a music which is that of a different rule than the one which obtains here and now, the kingdom of God.

This difference is a challenge, the challenge between being so different as to make no sense or so similar that the grace of God in what Christians proclaim is squeezed to a

## Confidentiality is precious, but how much more so in the context of confession



transparency. Conflicts between civil law and the church's ministry of reconciliation are nothing new or confined to oppressive regimes.

### Canon Law

I have referred to canon 113 of 1604, left un-amended in the 1969 canons. It belongs to the teaching of the church that confidentiality is to be observed. Indeed, in 1959 the Convocations of York and Canterbury affirmed that complete confidentiality here was 'an essential principle of Church doctrine'. It is not a matter just of law; although the canon is often referred to as a ground for the seal, the grounds go deeper. The ministry is part of the ministry of Jesus Christ to reconcile sinners, to restore those who sin to His church and to closer union with him. It is but a part of that continuing ministry, but it is a part of that ministry as it is of other Christian churches, whether they are Orthodox or Catholic where it has a higher profile than the Church of England, or among the Lutherans and Methodists. It is a ministry of mercy and is done by one who is in as much need of it as the one who comes seeking it.

### New life through Christ

The seal is there for the sake of the sinner. The integrity of *this* church member, warts and all, their return to the way to holiness, warts and all, is paramount. Moreover, if sinners are to unburden themselves, seeking reconciliation from Christ through His church, then it is right that they have an expectation that such disclosure is treated as a disclosure made to Christ, not as part of the merely human transaction of 'opening up', however good that may be. In contrast to the confidential communications made to doctors or to therapists, there is a 'third' involved who is the most important and active element in the whole proceeding, namely Christ. It is the saving death and resurrection of Christ who works through this ministry, both the penitent and the minister, to the end that new life is given and the presence of the Spirit in the sinner renewed. It is to God that the penitent confesses; from Him it is that forgiveness is sought, through the agency of the priest. One can say that the nature of the confidentiality comes from the nature of the ministry, indeed from the wonder of God's mercy itself.

### The veil of another world

In practical terms, what sinner, how venial, how grave 'soever, would find a green light to bring their sins to God, to unburden conscience and be reconciled to God, with all the wonder and difficulties together that might entail, if on leaving the church they were to be met by a pair of handcuffs? It might be argued of course that there are exceptional circumstances and one breaking of the seal could hardly do anyone any harm. This is patently foolish, for once the confidentiality of one confession is shown not to hold, then the security of all who hear confessions is shaken. If there are exceptions allowed in the inviolability of the confession, then it quickly becomes meaningless.

Even if absolution is not given, confidentiality obtains

[applies/pertains? AM] and obtains to everything disclosed in the confessional. However, the seal of the confessional does not extend to everything which may precede and follow the ministry; that is why it has always been regarded important to make clear what is a confession and what is not. Nor does it mean that other confidentialities are not of great importance and merit respect, such as that which falls to the meeting between a Christian and a soul-friend. Even outside the confessional, the courtesy is due to someone who has confided in a priest of asking their agreement should they think it right that a third party be involved. However, in the context of the confessional, what is said needs to be counted as not having been said; it is as if it has been buried. This was put with rhetorical vigour in earlier times. For example, Aquinas said that the priest knows the confession 'not as man, but as God knows it'. Later, our own T T Carter opined that what the priest hears he 'thus hears, he knows

only sacramentally, as within the veil of another world.' Nowadays we would put this more soberly perhaps, but the point remains that the seal is something owed to the nature of the ministry, something which is a sure gift of Christ, not to a supposed evidential privilege. It is simply a

matter of what is the duty of the priest, as a minister of the forgiveness of Our Lord and Our Christ.

### The ministry of reconciliation

Those who abuse the vulnerable are not queuing up at churches seeking reconciliation; nor are murderers, fraudsters, drug-dealers and the like. It has not been because of the keeping of such matters under the seal that the church has failed in her duty to children and the vulnerable. Among the abusers are those who are penitent and who want the forgiveness which comes from Christ alone; the path of returning to Christ will be one with demands and challenges, not least those entailed by the law and the administration of justice. Confessors will doubtless have occasion to relate these to the forgiveness God gives to those who are penitent; what is not to be done is for confessors to confuse being a minister of Christ and a policeman. If someone comes to the ministry of reconciliation who has abused someone, then there is likely to be a penitence which needs to be recognised and to be welcome in the name of Christ. One is not likely to be dealing with someone who is there in order to mock the church, some may recall the confession scene in Jimmy McGovern's film *Priest*, if they were, the seal would not apply, for it would not be a confession one was dealing with, but a sham.

In general, a confessor whose duty to keep mum is clear, is not likely to come across on a daily basis those who are confessing sins which have the light of the safeguarding officers upon them. What is more likely is the presence of those who have suffered abuse and who direct anger and blame towards themselves. The Church's ministry of reconciliation is there for them, not least so that they may come to know that acceptance by Christ in their own lives again and so that the Church may also find forgiveness. **ND**



# Satan's Bondage

**Crispin Harrison CR** offers a reflection on the Gospel of Luke 13:10-17

**O**ne Sabbath, Jesus was attending prayers in a synagogue. He saw a woman bent double so that she could look only at the ground. Her life must have been difficult and humiliating. She'd been like that for eighteen years.

## Astonishment and joy

Jesus stopped addressing the congregation and called her over and spoke to her: 'You are set free from your infirmity.' Then he laid his hands on her head as a sign of healing and blessing. Immediately she was made straight and stood upright, glorifying God. The synagogue erupted with cries of astonishment and shouts of joy. Everyone knew the woman and there was no doubt that she was standing up straight, as she couldn't before.

The crowd rejoiced because of all the wonderful things Jesus was doing and they praised God the giver of healing and all good things. The evangelist wants us to understand the significance of what Jesus had done and so he introduces a note of criticism and opposition.

## Imprisonment and deprivation

Luke tells us that the leader of the synagogue was indignant at the interruption of the service and rebuked Jesus saying: 'The Sabbath is a day of rest and not for the work of healing.' However, Jesus replied: 'You free your animals from their stalls to water them on the Sabbath and should not this woman be freed from Satan's bondage? She is of more value than any animal.'

She is an Israelite who believes in God as did faithful Abraham.' His words made his critics ashamed and the crowd shouted their support and approval. Jesus described the woman's affliction as a bondage brought about by Satan.

This doesn't necessarily mean that she was possessed by the devil but Jesus is saying that Satan is ultimately responsible for all that imprisons people and deprives them of the health God intends for his creatures.

Jesus was sent and empowered by God not just to work miracles but to free us from Satan's bondage. The merciful, compassionate love of Jesus and his life-giving Word is strong enough to overcome all the evil Satan can do. The woman's healing is a sign of the mission of Christ to save us and that is why her story is in the Gospel.

## Triumph of mercy and love

The leader of the synagogue's opposition to the mission of Jesus anticipated the opposition of the Jewish scribes and lawgivers, which culminated in his condemnation by the Council of the Sanhedrin and led to his death on the cross. Even in all that, Jesus triumphed through his mercy and love shown in his sacrifice for the whole world.

When he poured out his life-giving blood on Calvary, his mission to break Satan's grip on every member of the human race was accomplished. His victory was demonstrated in his resurrection from the dead on the third day. The Church militant is inevitably caught up in the mission of Jesus to overcome the forces of evil let loose by Satan into our world. In a sense, like the woman in today's Gospel, the world is bent, deformed, diseased and needs Christ's healing. We can speak only briefly about this vast topic.

We have only to reflect on the stories which daily appear on our television screens and newspapers. The seemingly insoluble conflicts, the greed for power, pleasure, possessions and money, the secularism and turning away from the worship of Almighty God; all these are indicators of Satan's work. How are we to combat all that? We reply: 'In the power of the Lord our God, who has promised to hear our prayer.'

We must combat the works of the Devil with the mercy and compassionate love of Jesus and his redeeming sacrifice. We should unite ourselves with his prayer and self-offering, which we do in the Holy Mass. **ND**

# Tent-makers of today

**T**he next time you see a list of clerical appointments, note not just the growing total of female clergy but also the number of clergy shown as NSMs. If marginalisation lies ahead for orthodox Church folk, it could be that NSM-'isation' will be the role for all FiF clergy in the future.

So a few tips for the NSMs of tomorrow: whilst it would be good if your training course has given you a grasp of NT Greek, it is no longer of any practical use.

I'm suggesting that if you become an NSM you don't need to continue with your pre-ordination job; other careers may fit in better with your FiF experience. You'll be used to speaking persuasively, arguing FiF's case, and then finding that no one is listening; this is ideal preparation for becoming a call-centre worker.

On the other hand there's an area of audience communication where employment grows as rapidly as the number of NSMs: that of stand-up comedian. TV channels and theatres are now as infested with stand-ups as the Western Isles are with midges. For an Anglican cleric there is an excellent learning opportunity, if you wish to join the stand-up comedians: drop in at General Synod and watch the experts at work. Jimmy Carr, Sarah Millican, Lenny Henry? Sorry, but you're just beginners.

If you don't make it as a comedian, there's still a place in entertainment. It's a role where your clerical collar proves an advantage, but you'd better take off your FiF badge. The job? BBC parson.

The doyen is Giles Fraser, rivalling Clare Balding as the most frequently heard broadcaster. On his heels: Richard Coles. However, he began with the 1980s pop group The Communards. Grab a guitar guys.

*Alan Edwards*



# Why the clergy need more holidays

**Digby Anderson** considers the pitfalls of worshipping away from home

**T**oday there is widespread ignorance about the church, but who, among the many and varied ignoramuses, knows least? Probably the full-time parish clergy. I'll explain why in a moment but consider first a few experiences of the church.

## Hands across the Atlantic

The first, one of my favourites, is of the snowbirds and a church of the stigmata. 'Snowbirds' are elderly, retired Americans from the Mid-West. Their proper home is cold in the winter so they migrate to the warm southern states for a few months. There they constitute winter communities. Like many Americans they are regular churchgoers. One of the churches where they constitute a majority, in the winter, is the church of the stigmata. As you enter the church and sit at the rear, you see the most unexpected and unpleasant sight. The oldies sit, on pews, rather as teenagers used to do in cinemas, the male with one arm stretched along the back of the pew round the shoulders of his lady, who responds by resting her head on the shoulder of her gentleman.

Throughout the mass, they sit and nuzzle and occasionally cuddle. If there is something in the mass that moves the gentleman, he will softly squeeze the upper arm of his companion and she will intensify the nuzzle whimpering softly. No doubt, when there is lots of squeezing, she will leave the church with feint stigmata on the upper arms. This is but one example of the disgusting sentimentality which suffuses the whole service. Indeed it reaches its climax after the dismissal. Visitors would do well then to go to one of the statues and remain a while, quite a while, in prayer: Holy Michael Archangel, defend this thy servant N. Grant him/her to pass safely from this temple, unmolested by the threatening welcome of the army of greeters, now gathered at the west door. Grant that he/she have the strength not to be rude to them and gain his/her carriage in peace.

## Closer to home

Back in Europe, I recall a church where the mass was unremarkable. Just as one was congratulating oneself on having found somewhere comparatively sane, suddenly at the communion, the church was filled with the noise of a cassette playing entirely secular music on South American Andean (nose) flutes and harps. In France, they have dentists, men in white albs with microphones, their volume higher than that of the celebrants who conduct the childish responses, waving their arms. Everyone knows of churches where services are ruined by clergy and laity putting "meaning" into their reading or even worse, trying to sound like (Welsh) actors, and worst of all, affecting the fashionable Australian rising intonation. Then emboldened by the missal instruction for homilies, there are priests who

have five at each mass; one to introduce the mass, one before the readings, one after the readings, one introducing the intercessions and one before the Pater Noster: 'and now, my dear sisters and brothers, mindful of those suffering in Syria, all those whom we have discriminated against, all pitiful victims of the bedroom tax and all (here a general repeat of the intercessions) let us pray in the words Jesus, himself, as a baby a victim of housing discrimination) gave us...' I could go on, about the ghastly daubing by children, the recorder music, indeed general infantilisation, dancing before the Lord or both the dancing and the children thus (this one from South-West France) children in peasant outfits dancing in a chain round the altar. Enough.

## At grass roots

Many readers will have tales of their own. But there is one set of people who do not see and hear these ghastly things: full-time parish clergy. Precisely because they are in their own churches dutifully conducting their own services, they rarely get into other churches to see what passes for religion there on Sundays apart from the rare two-week holiday. Thus a priest friend who has recently retired from full-time ministry and moved to a new town, phoned me

in a dreadful state. The gist? I have been trying to find a local church to go to on Sundays, Anglican or Roman. They are all awful but awful in so many different ways. He was surprised. He had not known what goes on in the Church. Full Time clergy, and laity committed to one church, when asked about the state of the Church, tend to answer in terms of encyclicals, reports, synod motions, in terms of high ecclesiology. They bemoan the irregular state of the CofE by which they mean its policies on women or homosexuals or whatever. They are right. These do describe the state the church is in - but only in one sense. They do not describe what churches actually do, the state of the main service at St Everywhere's.

## Style over substance?

Now there are those who think the goings on in actual churches are mere trivia, accidents. The substance, of the mass, remains the same despite such accidents. Yet perhaps there comes a point when the accidents, the gestures, words, liturgical disorder, become so far from the substance they are supposed to express that one has to wonder if the substance is totally unaffected. To adopt the Thomist distinction, these accidents threaten the effect of the sacrament if not its validity. Leave the theology for another day. The point here and now is that good priests' duties have the unintended consequence of keeping them ignorant about what is going on in the Church. That may be a mercy but it is also regrettable. How can they think about the Church if they are so ignorant? More, and longer holidays are certainly in order. **ND**

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# faith of our fathers

Arthur Middleton on Richard Hooker

November 3rd commemorates Richard Hooker, that great Anglican theologian, who presents a constructive synthesis in which the mystical, the intellectual and the institutional are mutually related and balanced. The mystical dimension is rooted in the 'sui generis' experience of the Church which constitutes the source and context of his theology, expounded not only in terms of 'intellectual clarity, but of a union of human lives with God in the way of holiness'. It is a dynamic presentation of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as the basis of ecclesiology and anthropology, while assuming into his theological vision the totality of creation, the world and human culture by referring it to its ultimate fulfilment in its restoration and transfiguration.

## The mystery of redemption

Here in Hooker's vision of the 'divine order' redemption extends to the whole universe, expressing that comprehensiveness of the Fathers that was a characteristic of their account of the central doctrine of the Christian faith. Set within this wider context of creation and redemption is the mystery of the complementarity of all things, with their distinctive contribution within the overall context of God's law that holds within it the 'laws of an ecclesiastical polity'. In this vision 'continuity' and 'wholeness' are of the 'esse' because of their sacramental

character within the 'divine order'. His vision is of a Christian mysticism that is rooted in the incarnate life of God. As such, it is grounded in history and within it is the world as sacrament.

The influence exerted by Hooker on the Church of England cannot be confined to the contents of this great work of literature and theology. After three hundred years Hooker's way of interpreting the continuing life of what became Anglicanism still speaks to issues facing the contemporary Anglicans in an age of ecumenism. In a century dominated by empiricism in debates about our knowledge of God, Hooker's *Polity* can still contribute, while his ecclesiology can address the dominant individualism of our times in its conflict with the corporate nature of Christianity. Finally, in the face of a rising biblical fundamentalism and politically correct theologies, Hooker's hermeneutical principles are a positive antidote.

## Tradition established

Anglicans today who are drawn to the texts of the Anglican and patristic tradition, written in relation to Christian truth, some of which may already have nourished one's soul, will find themselves in an encounter with the central Anglican tradition. Classical Anglicanism found in such people as Hooker and his successors, a tradition that was established outside the parameters of their own particular time

and thought, the solitary confinement of the 'present'. It offered to him alternatives that were not available to the historically-limited world of his time and enabled him to escape from the imprisoning effects of the contemporary religious controversies by bringing a productive past that still lived in the Church. It brought a critical stance to those controversies of his time and enabled him to render the more recent answers of their time questionable and not to be accepted simply as given.

## The world to come

Hooker was too devout a Christian to use the Church as a political convenience to secure the social and political objectives of a secular culture. This foundation in positive principle enables him to have a broad view of the Church and to take the charitable view he does. He sees the Church as rooted in the life of the world to come, where dwelt the creator of heaven and earth and thereby it is participant in this supernatural realm in the only victory that overcomes the world. For Hooker God is the source of all law in all time and in eternity, so that his universe is described by C.S. Lewis as: 'drenched in deity'. That which begins in the very being of God himself and extends from the angelic order, through the laws of nature to the laws which govern morality and salvation, such law is reason.

## The life of the Church of England

He would be critical of the life of the Church of England for thinking that theology and history and living in a tradition were unnecessary or that Christian faith could be sustained with an attenuated doctrine, politically correct ideologies and an anti-metaphysical age. There is no suggestion in Hooker that theology has to take a back seat behind moralism and social concern or a vague spirituality, because he believed that the destiny of man is to become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This could only be realised by a high and supernatural doctrine of the Person of Christ and the full Trinitarian view of the deity. These are built into life of the Church of England and expressed in her sacraments and worship. Hooker's work is 'drenched in God', whereas politically correct ideologies leave God out. **ND**





# Plato – a Christian?

John Herve says you might think so

*'Yes Father, their relationship is purely platonic – 'play' for him and 'tonic' for her!'*

**P**lato (428–348 BC) is a household name. He is so important in the history of Western thought that Philosophy itself has sometimes been regarded as commentary on Plato's works. And not only for the fact that he is the first Western philosopher whose writings remain complete and intact. But what is often minimized is the profound influence of Platonism on the development of Christianity. How so?

## Cultural dominance

Well, Platonism was the foremost philosophy in the Hellenistic world and thus the context in which Christianity developed and flourished. Not only was the New Testament written in Greek but it reflects this culture. It was important that Christian thinkers should address this, and make some attempt to accommodate Platonic thought (at least in part). Consequently its main concepts can be easily identified in orthodox Christian thinking.

This does not necessarily invalidate the former or the latter. It is to be expected that any soteriological view (i.e. salvation) would reflect pre-Christian influences; indeed, some would go so far as to argue that it was the mission of Socrates and his pupil Plato to fulfil this role.

*Warning!* – we always have to remember that their thinking was arrived at solely by philosophical argument and totally independently of Judeo/Christian influences with which we are so familiar.

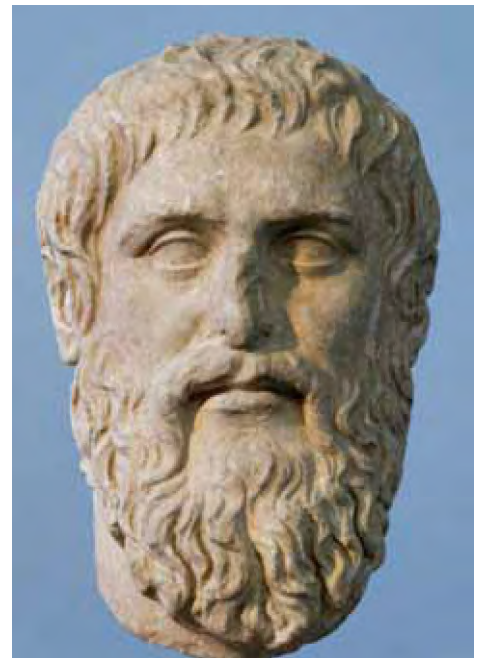
## Plato's background

Before we go any further, just a quick note about Plato's background. His Athens was at the apex of its development (the fifth and sixth centuries BC). Tremendous strides were being made not only in the area of Philosophy but also in physics, mathematics, astronomy, history,

architecture, sculpture, drama – and it was the first democracy. It was in the latter period of this that Plato formulated his concept of Forms and Ideas (not distinct but alternative titles). Here he was strongly influenced by Socrates (whom Plato regarded as among the wisest of all men); who when examining abstract concepts (such as 'integrity' and 'faithfulness') was not constructing a definition but actually searching for an *entity* – something which *physically existed!* Moreover, these had an eternal quality. Now Plato developed this approach more widely, giving it a universal application. Thus everything, and he means *everything*, in our world is a 'shadowy' reflection of an ideal 'Form' which has an eternal reality; and he marshalled many supportive arguments for this from across a wide range of disciplines.

## He 'rings bells'

At once this resonates with Christian thought. There is a divided reality. There is the world of experience subject to change and decay (*sic transit Gloria mundi*) – the only world we can truly know. Then there is another world we cannot truly know which is eternal and perfectly ordered. This is truly real, unchanging and cannot be shaken. It is apparent straightaway what the implication of all this is when considering what it is to be human: that there is part of us which is transitory, subject to decay, and this reflects a part of us (a second 'form') which is imperishable, timeless and indestructible. The Christian calls this the soul. So the influence of Platonism on Christian thought is obvious. But we must persistently remind ourselves that his philosophy does not call for any belief in a Deity or the acceptance of any concept of revealed religion. There have been many Platonists who would not claim to be 'religious' in any form. And indeed Plato himself did regard his 'Ideal Form' as divine, and also believed in reincarnation; views not necessarily shared by his adherents.




Nevertheless the philosophical 'world' has forever been pre-occupied (particularly in the Middle Ages) with the impact and influence of Platonism on Christianity.

## And there's more!

There is an important 'post-script' to all this. Another outstanding disciple of Plato who had a profound influence on Christianity was Plotinus (204–269 AD). He developed the mystical elements in Plato's thought (Neo-Platonism) and never mentioned Christianity, nor was he one himself. Yet his works had a profound influence on the two great philosophers of the next thousand years (Augustine and Aquinas). Dean Inge (1860–1954), an expert on Platonic Spirituality, wrote of Plotinus as: 'the great thinker who must be, for all time, the classical representative of mystical philosophy. No other mystical thinker even approaches Plotinus in power and insight and profound spiritual penetration.'

## Key works

Plato wrote twenty-four works, in dialogue form, of varying lengths. His Greek prose is unsurpassed in *The Republic* (overall philosophy), *The Symposium* (the nature of love) and other dialogues named after the foremost interlocutor of Socrates (e.g. *Phaedo*, the *Laches*, the *Euthyphro*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Parmenides*). A gentle introduction is the *Apology*, *Phaedo* and *Crito* which contain his essential portrait of Socrates. 

# devotional

## Austin Farrer on The Bible

**F**arrer's *Short Bible*, is a selection of readings from the Authorized Translation. It was to help those unfamiliar with the Bible to grasp the essential message. His aim is to explain the most basic facts about the Bible and provide some insight to its contents and some guidelines to its interpretation.

### The person and work of Christ

The scripture expresses the whole work of God, what his work does, what it works with, and what it works against, all are there; sin and error appear beside truth and holiness, fantasy and idealisation beside the unflinching delineation of failure, and, as we all know, Satan quotes nothing but the Bible. If Christ were not there to set Satan right, we should not know what to think.

It is valued and read for the sake of a single theme. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are included under a single name for no other reason than this, that through them the person and work of Jesus Christ is understood. The New fulfils the Old, the Old is indispensable for understanding the New.

The unity of the Bible can be best appreciated from

within; so Farrer starts with the Epistle to the Galatians where Paul is writing to avoid a crisis in the young Church.

### Unity and authority.

It illuminates the heart of its author and reveals the painful discords of the first Christian days when Galatians had converted to Christianity. Paul tells them they are now, in virtue of their faith members of the true Israel of God. Few of them have any Jewish roots or connections. Now they take over the destiny of the Chosen People.

Paul objects that God gave him the gospel and sent him to preach it in the non-Jewish world and he has made sure that his gospel was the same as the original apostles who acknowledged him for a colleague. If non-Jews accept circumcision and the Jewish customs, they cannot single-mindedly believe that the true Israel is constituted by acceptance of the Messiah, and by that alone. Paul supports his claims by sketching his career. He has been in the new movement almost from the start. The common ground of the preaching places salvation here and hereafter in adherence to Christ, in obedience to him, and in a supernatural share of his life and Spirit, a gift bestowed on his followers through death and resurrection.

Jesus Christ in the Gospels, and St Paul in his several epistles are concerned with the action of God in their own time, through which his love for mankind takes practical effect. It is all the more remarkable that what they have to say is so largely expressed by means of allusion to the Old Testament. **ND**

**‘I**t is all about eternity’, so said a Priest friend of mine last week. We were comparing notes, in general terms, about Spiritual Direction. ‘It is amazing,’ he went on, ‘how few people consider death and what lies beyond it.’ I had to agree.

It is not that I recommend the contemplation of mortality as a regular spiritual exercise, but spiritual direction is not about being a ‘life coach’ it is more about being an ‘everlasting life coach.’ The aim is salvation for eternity, not the management of lifestyle. The purpose is to learn to live in the now in order that we may live in eternity.

In looking to our eternal end we stand on solid ground. To live with the reality of mortality is a prerequisite of looking to the things that last forever. That most gentle and Anglican of saints Bishop Edward King asked congregations to imagine being a guest at their own funeral, and then, in imagination, to stand at their own grave. His purpose was to encourage the lifting up of the mind and heart to: ‘Christ in you, the hope of a glory yet to come.’

In his ‘First Principle and Foundation’ to his Spiritual Exercises St Ignatius

## Ghostly Counsel

### Spiritual exercises

**Andy Hawes** is Warden of Edenham Regional Retreat House

begins with one fundamental principle: ‘Mankind is created to praise reverence and serve God and by this means to save his soul.’ In this month of November the liturgy of the church lifts up our minds and hearts to the ‘spiritual realm where Christ is’; the place ‘where Christ has gone before and opened for us a new and living way.’ The sequence of All Saints and All Souls, Remembrance Sunday and then the Feast of Christ the King anticipate the great themes of Advent: Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgement.

In too many cases the individual’s spiritual journey is several steps removed from the corporate life of the church. It is amazing to me how many

people pursue a spiritual life in the Christian tradition without engaging fully in the liturgical life of the church. It is a disturbing sign of the times that the individual ‘need’ almost always trumps the responsibility of belonging to the Body of Christ. A consequence of this is a change of focus from the challenge and call of a ‘full Gospel’ to a pick and mix perception of the Christian vocation. The awful majesty of God and the prospect of ‘being known even as I am known’ is not as attractive as some fluffy Celtic Prayer Book about the ‘loving, surrounding upholding Creator of earth, sea and sky.’

I am not prone to cynicism but the assumption of many people seems to be that ‘I can get it right now’. As I often remind people: ‘we are nowhere near heaven yet.’ We live in a fallen creation; we have to live by faith in a life that is often confusing, dangerous and fearful. But ‘here we have no abiding city’; here we have only ‘a foretaste of the heavenly banquet,’ where St Augustine reminds us: ‘we shall rest and we shall see, we shall see and we shall love, we love and we shall praise in our end which has no end.’



# The fear of the Lord

**Garegin Hambardzumyan** preaches on holy fear and following the teaching of God.

*“And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.”*

**T**hese are the words of St Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, as she shared a thought about God. Today we are gathered here in this magnificent Church of St Magnus the Martyr to celebrate St Mary, the Mother of God. The Universal Church has been celebrating many feasts of St Mary in one way or another for over 19 centuries.

## A glimpse of heaven

Going through the life of the Theotokos, the one who gave birth to God, we first hear Mary, as a young girl of about seventeen, speaking of God's love and justice. And then we fast-forward about a half century later when she is taken into God's kingdom body and soul. She is the very first person to share completely in the promises of the Resurrection. She shared closely and deeply in Jesus' life and ministry and death. And she shares a special and unique place in Christ's Resurrection. She is our glimpse into Heaven.

Through her, we hear a very important message. It is a message most people forget; it is the message that Jesus' Resurrection is transferable to us; it is the message that eternal life is ours for the taking.

## The promise of St Mary

She offers us a glimpse into Heaven. In these words Mary opens up her heart and shows the pure joy inside. She was deemed worthy to become the Mother of the Lord and that filled her with great joy. But about halfway through, Mary's words change from words of joy to words of advice for others.

She says: 'And God's mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation' - great words, comforting words. These words offer us encouragement in life. They show us that God is with us at all times: In both the joys of life and sorrows of life; in our days of health and our days of illness; in the good days and bad days.

God is with those who invite Him into their lives. This is the promise of St Mary.

## Fear and respect

Now what does it mean to 'fear God'? 'The mercy of God is on those who fear Him,' says St Mary. The word 'fear' in a biblical sense can mean more than 'being afraid.' For St Mary, 'fear' means to respect the ways of God, to do as God expects, and to simply obey His teachings.

In other words, follow the teachings of God and you will enjoy His mercy in your eternal life. It means taking a look at the people God has placed in your life - your family, friends, children, spouses, parents, co-workers, whoever it may be, and take the storms in their lives and bring out a rainbow;

help turn their tears into a smile; for every trial they face become a blessing to them; and for every sigh they express, be for them the sweet song they are looking for.

## The Light of God

The words of St Mary are as relevant for us today as when she first spoke them. We are to use our time in this world, no matter how long or short that is, for the glory of God; to help meet each other's needs, and to spread His Light everywhere we walk in this world. Through our words and actions, we can participate with God, as did Mary, in bringing truth and peace and justice to our world. As the Church, the Body of Christ, we model Mary's motherhood. And how do we do this? Often it is in the simple, ordinary things of life.

Our gathering today in this Church is a great example of the desire to follow the words of God, to praise His glorious name together and to share the joy of Christ's everlasting

presence amongst us. This is also a beautiful occasion for making even stronger the already strong friendship and brotherhood that the Anglican and the Armenian apostolic Churches share. Love and fear of the Lord must be the basis of all kinds

of inter-ecclesiastical and ecumenical relationships as well. We have a tradition of calling the Church, the mother of all the baptised, those who have been born in her womb in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Mutual love

Now, if there is one mother and not many, then her children cannot be alienated, but they must look after each other and pray for each other. St Paul in his first Letter to the Thessalonians says: 'Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.' Mutual encouragement and mutual love, this is what matters. The role of the Mother of God is crucial in this. Our belief about the Theotokos is expressed above all through the medium of prayer and worship. Our faith is disclosed through, and conditioned by, the way in which we pray. As the famous Orthodox Theologian Georgiy Florovsky says: 'Christianity is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second.'

For Orthodox Christianity the Mystery of the mother of God is a liturgical mystery. I am sure the same understanding of the mystery was and still is in the core of the Fraternity of Our Lady de Salve Regina. One of the main objects of the Fraternity has always been The Daily recitation of the anthem of Our Lady and the Salve Regina but as we read in the history of the Guild, it has always had an objective to be with the poor and afflicted and to treat others as one would treat Christ himself, the heavenly promise of everlasting happiness. Mary is mother of the promise, mother of us all. It is interesting that the root of the word 'promise' comes from the Latin for 'sending forth.' For God in unconditional love sent forth the Word, made flesh, through Mary. It is

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**God is with those who invite  
Him into their lives.  
This is the promise of St Mary.**

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from her womb that Mary sent Jesus, God's promise, into the world. She gives us Jesus the Christ, so that, through his death and resurrection, we may be saved that we might live as daughters and sons of that unbroken promise.

### Promise and hope

As children of God, we are called to make known the promise, to send forth this message of hope to our world. As St Augustine once said: 'Christ is truth and peace and justice, conceive him in faith, give birth to him in works, so that what Mary's womb did for the flesh of Christ, your hearts may do for Christ's law.' Until the last minute of her earthly life Holy Mary was a real source of encouragement for the apostles who were being persecuted for their mission. Being between heaven and earth, Mary still continued praying and rejoicing in the presence of angels.

When on the cross Christ called Mary and John setting a new closer relationship between them, Christ gave all of us to the matronage of Holy Mary to be comforted by her sweet voice. 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' We call the Mother of God, a tool of Salvation, an example of love and humility. By her blessed example until the present day she encourages us in our faith to be light where there is no light and to spread love where there is absence of love: 'The mercy of God is extended to all who fear Him from generation to generation.' May we all take the time to think about how we personally 'fear' the Lord in the way St Mary says we should 'fear' Him. **ND**

*This sermon was preached by Fr Garegin Hambardzumyan at St Magnus The Martyr, London for the Annual Festival of the Fraternity of O.L. de Salve Regina 21 September 2013*

## "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."

**David McConkey** finds inspiration and confidence and courage in being the first to move forward

I want to introduce you today to a Biblical character I daresay many of you will not have heard of. His Hebrew name is Nachshon, the son of Amminadab, and he is listed in the census of the book of Numbers as the head of the tribe of Judah at the time of the exodus from Egypt, when he is at least twenty years old. Later we find that he didn't survive the wilderness years to enter the promised land, but died before he reached the age of sixty.

Also in the book of Numbers we learn about some significant relatives: Aaron, the first high-priest, was his brother-in-law; and Rahab, the harlot who made Joshua's invasion of Jericho possible, was his daughter-in-law. Moreover, Nachshon is listed in the genealogy of the ancestors of Jesus in Chapter One of St Matthew's Gospel: he was the father of Salmon, the father of Boaz, who was the father of Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David.

### Interesting departures

We have to depart from the Biblical text, though, to find what may be the most interesting story about Nachshon. This comes from what we may call rabbinic lore or legend. I will say immediately that I am

cautious about such a source; and yet like rabbis both ancient and modern when I read a Biblical narrative, even a relatively fulsome one like the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, there are unarticulated details I'm keen to know. If you try to picture this episode what do you see in your mind's eye? Do you think the Israelites formed an orderly procession to the mouth of the sea and then stepped forward two by two into it?

Well, perhaps the text is patient of such a reading: 'The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left' (Exod. 14:21-22), we read; and perhaps it was as straightforward as that sounds. But having behind me a few decades of leading well-meaning and well-intentioned people through difficulties and dangers of various sorts I have to admit to a degree of scepticism.

The rabbis, as they told the story, evidently had their doubts as well. They noticed the previous verses about the consternation of Israel as they

neared the sea, their loud complaining and their reluctance to go forward. The rabbis, in short, imagined this not an orderly procession but a scene of chaos. Said they: 'The Israelites stood at the banks of the sea and wailed with despair, until Nachshon entered the waters. Once he was up to his nose in the water, the sea parted. Then, only then, did Israel walk through the Red Sea as on dry ground.'

### Moving forward

Well, we have to admit that their imaginative interpretation moves beyond the literal scriptural text. They justify it, by the way, by noticing that when Moses had set up the tabernacle in the wilderness and there was a liturgy of dedication of it, that it was Nachshon who carried forth the offerings: silver and fine meal, incense and a menagerie of sacrificial beasts. Why was Nachshon accorded this signal honour, they found themselves asking?

Surely it was because he had already distinguished himself, shown himself a leader among leaders. From this conclusion flowed their conjecture that out of a recalcitrant and refractory people Nachshon alone had the presence of mind to go forward.



‘Why do you cry to me?’ the text says the Lord God remonstrated with Moses: ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’ Forward in faith. I’m not sure whether the founders of this organisation, in the confusing and bewildering days and months after the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1992, had this verse in their minds when they gave their fledgling society this name, but it would form an admirable motto for the work to which we are called: ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’ More than twenty years later, the mewling infant having found its voice and having survived its adolescence, more than a few of us wonder whether it can, whether we can, weather the wilderness years we know still lie before us.

### Unwavering conviction

‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’ I don’t know whether you take seriously the tale of Nachshon or not, but we all know that there have been men and women of clear sight and unwavering conviction who have helped us get where we are. Some of them have given up the fight and made their peace with doctrinal innovations they once opposed. Some are no longer in the church militant, and we shall remember them fondly and thankfully at the altar next month.

Some of our friends have been diverted, at least as we see it, onto slightly different paths, and despite our differing apprehension of the right

way forward we remember them also, fondly and thankfully. But what of us who remain? Not a few of us are battle-weary. I’ve been arguing the case for the apostolic ministry since 1976, and there are not a few others who have done the same for at least as long. Alongside us has grown up a new generation, including some who weren’t yet born in November of 1992. Whatever else we say to those un-persuaded by our position,

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**we all know that there have been men and women of clear sight and unwavering conviction who have helped us get where we are**

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we are bound to remind them that what we assert about the apostolic ministry is not just the moanings of superannuated die-hards.

### Confidence and courage

‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’ That charge from God Almighty is as relevant to us as it was four millennia ago. Not so much different for us than it was then, the scene at the banks of the Red Sea is a picture of chaos. We’re not sure how to go forward, and our consternation issues in mutterings of various kinds. We’re unsure of our leaders; we’re tired of always being in the minority; we imagine that our parishes would get

better treatment from our dioceses if we just weren’t so obstreperous.

However, Forward in Faith is the vocation of every one of us: ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’ We can be grateful that in our national leadership there is a voice akin to that of Moses that keeps sounding that call in our ears. But if we are to go forward, we need some Nachshons as well: men and women undismayed by the chaos, sturdy saints who will walk into the waters right up to their nostrils with confidence and courage.

God isn’t deaf to our need; the Kingdom belongs to him, and it is his will to share it with his faithful people. Even today, amongst us are those who will unperturbed go forward. I don’t doubt that Nachshon is the name of the vocation of every last one of us, and if we walk forward we don’t walk alone. A faithful God goes before us; a faithful Saviour fights the battles we are powerless to win; a faithful Spirit fills our hearts with the very life breath that animates all living things.

Nachshon stepped into the waters, walked out into the waters, waded through the waters till they were as high as his nostrils. But then the waters parted, and the children of Israel walked through them on dry ground; and so may we. **ND**

*This sermon was originally preached in All Saints’ Church, Northampton, Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2013, at the Festival of Faith for the Diocese of Peterborough Chapter of Forward in Faith*

