

FR HOYAL WRITES

Shalom & Ruach

No, *not* a firm of cutting-edge Jewish solicitors...

According to John's Gospel, when the Risen Lord appears to the Eleven (le Thomas) on the evening of the first Easter Day, he greets them not once but twice with the words: Peace be with you. He also breathes on them and says: Receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus doubtless spoke in Aramaic. But he would certainly be well acquainted with the Old Testament words for peace – shalom, of course – and for Spirit: Ruach.

Peace and the Spirit, then, Shalom and Ruach, are Christ's Easter gifts to his disciples, and they are vital gifts. What might they mean for us, celebrating the Paschal victory some two thousands years later?

In Lent this year we sought to be led by the Spirit.

On Sunday mornings our preachers helped us explore how we relate our Christian call to live in the Spirit to the tricky realities of power, relationship, suffering and destiny.

Sunday evenings gave those attending the chance to think about what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit, those qualities like love, joy, faithfulness, and peace itself, that are mentioned in Galatians 5 – qualities that show in our lives when we live with real openness to the grace of God.

Our Tuesday evening talks focused our attention on different aspects of the nature and work of God as he is known to us in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Have these opportunities helped to make us a little more receptive to the Shalom and Ruach that Christ's death and resurrection can release among us? I hope so, for Shalom and Ruach are just what we need.

Shalom is less about the absence of conflict than the possession of indwelling spiritual wholeness. It is this that Jesus is talking about when he says to his disciples at the Last Supper: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you; and

as the world gives I give to you. It is the peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ because we know that we belong, that we are loved, that we are “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven” as the hymn aptly puts it. The Holy Spirit is holy Shalom.

Holy Spirit is about being alive with the life of God, animated and inspired by the life-giving breath that turns dry bones into living flesh. This Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. No breath, no physical life; no Holy Spirit, and you can't be spiritually alive. No Holy Spirit, no holiness; no anything of consequence.

But holy Shalom and Holy Spirit are not given without a purpose. As the Father sent me so I send you, says Jesus. We need personal experience of holy Shalom if we are to have any success in our mission to live and share the Christian life. What one hasn't received, one cannot give.

The Holy Spirit of the Risen Lord is given for mission, too, and to empower us for particular service as in the case of the apostles. In various ways we are all, called to speak, ordained for particular ministries. Only through God's Holy Spirit with us can our lives effectively express that Jesus is Lord and that the Lord has risen. For as John's Gospel teaches us elsewhere, it is the Holy Spirit who witnesses to Jesus, just as it is Jesus who witnesses to the Father.

Whether or not Lent has been all it should be for you, do have a holy and happy Easter. But don't let it pass you by without making sure the Easter Lord blesses you with his divine Shalom and his all-holy Holy Spirit.

You will know if he has blessed you, by the way, because in your thankfulness for these wonderful Easter gifts you will find yourself eager to share them with others in mission and service. Easter – the real thing – makes apostles of all.

Richard Hoagland

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

All Saints hosted the Women's World day of Prayer this year on 2 March. The service was written by the Christian women of Paraguay and we were very fortunate to have Muriel Hoyal on hand to turn the church into an amazing Paraguayan rain forest. Sadly, it had to come down at the end of the morning.

Jean James, Lovinia Miller's friend, wrote to me and sent a report for us in the form of a letter. I quote:

"The decoration of the church was solely due to Muriel's skill, style and ability to transform the church for such a short period of time into an incredible area for the South American country of Paraguay. The ambience of the church was transformed on entry by the gentle sound of pan music resounding throughout the church and setting the scene into context.

All aspects of the service had been meticulously checked and rehearsed in a very short period of time and called 'United Under God's Tent'. It gave the women here in Bristol, plus a few men, a real flavour of life in Paraguay and what some of their problems were, whether they were rich, poor or somewhere in between. Their problems were manifold, but the churches are beginning to work together to provide a programme of education and information to enable women to be able to use all their skills in teaching others less able than themselves to help themselves. Their one great advantage is that 'the family' is still at the heart of society, several generations living and working together for the benefit of the family. This is something that we here in the West could learn from, our frequently fragmented and dysfunctional families have lost the reason to remain closely linked. The speaker brought it all together well.

A very big thank you to all at All Saints, who attended the service, prepared and then cleared the church of its decorations, and those who served the refreshments. I have been to many WWDofP services and this one was quite the most enjoyable and memorable I've had the privilege to attend."

Jean James

Churchwarden's Notes

24/2/7 The Sacristy and the Richard Chapel have been cleaned. Well done to one and all and I am really, really sorry I didn't wake up in time.

25/2/7 Failed to concentrate on 9 30 service owing to blue spotted cow two pews ahead. See below for action taken in consequence.

Later: I set up for Evensong and notice a new thing. The Books of Common Prayer are vanishing. I cannot understand this. Unless it is a pogrom by the Roman Missile Society; certainly they have no saleable value. But at least 20 have gone AWOL.

I have put up a New Rota. It is in the porch on my favourite yellow paper. Penitential purple would have been more appropriate but a lot less eye catching. Don't fight over it, queue is a respectable fashion and I am sure there will be a space for you.

In my last, I mentioned that rare thing, a Latin expression unknown to me. The equivalent of Laetare Sunday in Advent. The answer is Gaudete (hence no doubt the Steeleye Span carol setting). I received two replies, both carrying a bonus in the form of a rebuke. I had referred to the middle Sunday of Advent, and there cannot be a middle Sunday of four. So unfair, I don't do arithmetic. The Sacristan technically wins the prize, but the AHE Organist had plenty to say for himself, so I shall reward both. Appropriately. Just watch out.

11/3/7 9 30 am. I'm fighting back. The large brown teddy bear from the Parish Office shared my pew, and so did the small white one from Lost Property who desperately needs a new friend. Blue spotted cow wasn't there, but the bears are ready for her next visit.

Later. Evensong. Oooo-er. The BCP is back; massed ranks of them stacked where they ought to be. Where can they have been?

Off on a spree no doubt. I love a mystery. Still more do I love a conundrum, and tonight we had both. Father John spoke on Faithfulness as a gift of the Spirit, both being faithful and being full of faith. I'm sorry to give the next bit out of context, but I don't have the text: he said that the opposite of Faith is Worry. I cannot be the only person to remember that one of his clerical colleagues has also spoken on Faith, and instructed us that the opposite of Faith is [not doubt but] Certainty. I don't do arithmetic, but I do do logic. What are we to make of the statement that Certainty = Worry? Theologically, that is.

12/3/7 7 15 am. I know we're short of cash, but when we cannot light the candles unless the Churchwarden surrenders her personal box of matches to Fr Flammifer Jr things are getting pretty bad.

Are you remembering that new rota? We have to rethink assistant sacristan. No one has come forth, and the Head Honcho Sacristan says it sounds boring. Which it isn't. No, it's nail biting edge of seat stuff. Suggestions please? Cupbearer? Head cook and bottle washer? Page person? Trug beetle?

18/3/7 A small point of order for my team. You're a smart lot, nicely turned out, clean and neatly brushed. By and large. But if you intend to turn up for Mass, even Low Mass, in sweatshirt, joggers and trainers with silly shiny bits on them, the JCW requires a Note from Home. You know who I mean

And finally, in the course of my professional duties I found a poem which I should like to share with you. This involves breaking both my hypocritical oath as an archivist and copyright law, so please do not split on me, and don't let anything legal see this copy of the mag. This was written by a 14 year old local boy in the 1950s.

The colours of the crucifixion

Brown was the wood which He carried,

Brown in the setting sun;
White was the town in the valley,
White as His life had begun.

Green was the slope where He stumbled,
Green as the leaves on a tree;
Black were the thorns that had crowned Him,
Black as the turbulent sea.

Grey were the nails when they nailed Him,
Grey as the unleavened bread;
And when the soldiers transfixed Him,
Red was the blood that He shed.

SPIRIT & FAMILY

Lent sermon preached by Fr Hoyal at the 8 am Mass on 18 March (Mothering Sunday). The Gospel Reading was The Prodigal Son.

Appropriately for Mothering Sunday, “Spirit and Family” is to-day’s theme in our continuing Lent Sunday morning series picking up on our overall Lent motif of Led by the Spirit.

Not that the Spirit is mentioned as such in to-day’s Gospel, the very familiar tale of those two brothers: the younger one reckless and feckless, bored with work on his father’s estate, eager to get a life, eager to sample what the world, the flesh and the devil can offer: the other loyal, hardworking, but self-righteous, prone to envy and resentment. And of course there is the father, forbearing, patient, very generous, eager to hold his family together despite all the tensions and setbacks.

It has to be said that no mother is mentioned. Perhaps that is part of the trouble. No one can fault the father’s deep generous love for both his sons, flawed as each of them is. He is also rather modern in that he is a patient persuader rather than a patriarchal dictator and enforcer. He respects his sons, even in their freedom to make bad choices and be at variance. But perhaps the distinctive love and wisdom and influence of

a good mother is needed too. Might we mentally embellish the story and imagine that it was there, and had much to do, lovingly mending rancour and picking up the pieces in the wake of the father's almost embarrassing generosity to the younger son both in letting him go and in taking him back?

This sublime story of Jesus is primarily illustrative of the almost recklessly loving forgiveness God our heavenly Father extends to those he is glad to own as his children. But of course it is also a cameo of frequent tendencies and tensions in real everyday family life as we live it. It speaks of a family home and a family status that always belong to us, even when rejected as irksome or dull, a home that can always be returned to when we finally come to our senses, and a status that can always be recovered as soon as we start back. The best of earthly homes and earthly families offer these great blessings too.

In Galatians St Paul gives us a grim catalogue of what he calls the works of the flesh, the sins that so easily lure unredeemed human nature: they are fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing. "And suchlike," adds Paul finally, as if they weren't enough!

These items rather make us wince, especially at this time of the morning on a Sunday. But Paul isn't wrong, is he? And many of these works of the flesh are clearly evident in the behaviour and attitudes of the two brothers. Against this list, though, he sets his sublime inventory of what he calls the fruit of the Spirit, and these are much more agreeable to hear if demanding to achieve: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It is these that are safest as family values.

In to-day's story, of course, it is the prodigal father, the father who is so lavish in his feelings for his boys despite their failings – it is the prodigal Father – who best displays these hallmarks of the Spirit's presence in our lives. In the case of the heavenly Father, whom this earthly father stands for, of course, all the gift and fruits of the Spirit have their ultimate source in his own generous fatherly heart.

If we have come alive through the Spirit, comments St Paul, after listing these great virtues, let us also walk in the Spirit - make them part and parcel of our ongoing life, that is, as we let the Spirit of God work in us day by day and hour by hour. It is of course his presence, his grace, his guidance, that families need if the good in them is to be endorsed and multiplied, and if the evils in them are to be contained and remedied.

Humanly speaking, just occasionally there are households where, against all the odds for a male human being, the father is a saint. But saints aren't always very practical and perhaps his very goodness, his very holiness, sometimes makes it easy for his children to take advantage of him, and they err. Happily, there is often a saintly mother, perhaps a little more the Martha than the Mary, who is able to ground saintliness in practical homemaking ways that make it possible for family members to relate well to their parents and each other, so they forgive and forbear, and so that even if they sometimes stray from home and the values of home the home and what it stands for are always there ready and waiting to embrace them alongside their father and their mother.

In a way, at her best, the Church on earth is a bit like that, mediating as she does the loving holiness of God to her children in Christ. All hail to her this Mothering Sunday, as to the mothers we so keenly honour this day - not least of course the holy Mother who physically brought the fullness of God's loving mercy to birth for the sake of us all and has the first place in heavenly home where the Father is always waiting for us, eager to welcome us back to him for ever. May his Spirit indeed be with us, for it is the Spirit who will make us his family for an eternity of love and joy.

IN THIS MONTH....APRIL 1885

A Terrible Quarrel

What is to be done? Our Magazine is more than a Week late. The Editor says that it is all the Vicar's Fault, that he could not get the Vicar to do anything for the Magazine. The Vicar says that it is

quite as much the Editor's fault as his, that he has been waiting for the Editor to do his Part of the Work. Meanwhile the Editor will not speak to the Vicar, and the Vicar will not speak to the Editor. This is all very sad. Easter is not a time for Divisions. Can no one set them at one again?

