

Fr Hoyal Writes

How things have changed since our last All Saints-tide celebrations.

A year ago very few foresaw the panic that has since hit the world's money markets, and the unprecedented financial interventions that governments have resorted to in order to protect banks from collapsing. The whole international climate has dramatically darkened.

We now see only too plainly that a decade of irresponsible lending and injudicious borrowing is to be paid for by recession and unemployment. As usual, it will be those individuals and countries lowest down the pile that will suffer most.

The current troubles of the Anglican Communion and the Church of England will appear parochial and irrelevant to most people in comparison. But they too seem to have gone from bad to worse at a rate far swifter than many expected. And who, I wonder, will be hardest hit by the fall-out?

It is a tribute to the remarkable personal qualities of Archbishop Rowan Williams that this year's Lambeth Conference was not the complete disaster predicted, despite the crippling absence of so many African bishops in particular. But, in truth, little has been resolved. A dangerous fuse is still burning.

The Gafcon conference held in Jerusalem shortly before Lambeth has been much criticized. But the extensive and growing network of conservative dioceses and church people who identify with Gafcon cannot be ignored, and nor should they, any more than those with opposing convictions.

Meanwhile none of us can feel proud of the expulsions and secessions of clergy, parishes and, in one case, of a whole diocese

that have been taking place in North America. But might it happen here if we are not very careful?

Wherever church people seem to be saying intemperately to other church people that there is no real place for them or their convictions, nothing but further dissension and fragmentation can be expected.

Sadly, last July's General Synod ignored advice from the most senior level and voted out every proposal that would have given that section of the Church unconvinced about women bishops a little dry ground to stand on with integrity.

The (ill-defined) code-of-practice option finally proffered by Synod is simply inadequate to meet the predicament of traditionalists. As Archbishop Williams himself understands, their needs can only be met by official structural provision, in some form or other, for an assured and uncompromised succession of a college of traditionalist male bishops within the wider episcopate.

Unless Synod's decision is reversed, I really cannot see how clergy and lay people with conscientious difficulties about women's ordination can have a future in their own Church. And as a dyed-in-wool cradle Anglican with the deepest love for our beloved Church of England, ancient, catholic and reformed, as by law established, I am dismayed at the prospect.

This is an area which must inevitably be of concern to All Saints Clifton, where church members with different views on controversial issues have nonetheless remained remarkably united as a parish. It is my ardent hope that we can remain united.

Those who read this will have differing views. But I do hope that all will pray that the integrity of our fellowship at All Saints will not be impaired by reckless decisions at national level.

These are solemn things to be mentioning as we prepare to celebrate our great feast of title. But the great company of saints

we honour, both renowned and obscure, never led charmed lives. Life has never been like that, at least not for anyone ever called to take up their cross and follow Christ.

They never led *charmed* lives. They led *holy* lives, lives sanctified by their openness, despite formidable difficulties and horrific sufferings, to God's loving grace.

Our current Church difficulties are the merest pinpricks in comparison with the tribulations of the saints we now so gratefully honour. Indeed they are trivial in relation to the sufferings of many Christians to-day facing hatred and persecution, for example Christian communities in parts of Iraq such as Mosul and in the Indian state of Orissa.

This rather brings our attention back to those who are in any way at the bottom of the pile in society. So many of the saints either suffered, Christlike, at the hands of others, or spent their lives caring for Christ as they found him in the needy, suffering or despised people of their day.

Decisions and stands do sometimes have to be made in Church matters. But as Liz Badman reminded us in a recent evensong address, "In the evening of life we shall be examined in love." Those simple but deeply penetrating words of St John of the Cross put everything in perspective.

Richard Hoag

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, CLIFTON

Pembroke Road

AWAKE! LISTEN!

REPENT!

**‘ADVENT
VOICES’**

COME! PREPARE!

REJOICE!

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

OF MUSIC & READINGS

FOR

ADVENT SUNDAY

6.00 pm 30th NOVEMBER

All most welcome

Religion and Shakespeare -- Recommendations for your Reading

Shadow Play -- The hidden beliefs and coded politics of William Shakespeare

by Clare Asquith, pub. Public Affairs 2005

Clare Asquith is interested in the Roman Catholic background, and politics in Shakespeare's lifetime; and explores the evidence that can be deduced of his beliefs and politics from his plays.

Antonia Fraser writes "a riveting literary detective story."

Dissolution, Dark Fire, Sovereign, and Revelation - by C.J. Sansom, pub MacMillan

-a series of detective stories set in the Reign of Henry the Eighth with a hunchback lawyer detective Shardlake, who is employed by Cromwell and later Cranmer -- highly recommended for those who love history; and detective tales like those of P.D. James concerned with questions of religious faith and belief. Colin Dexter of Morse fame writes "Sansom writes about the past as if it were the living present"

These books have given me cause to pause, reflect and ask myself why it is that, otherwise perfectly reasonable people, fly in the teeth of evidence and assert that Shakespeare is not, and cannot have been the author of the plays attributed to him. Perhaps the bias in the case of religion is

more understandable -- theories that Christ was not crucified, married Mary Magdalen however require similar manipulation of evidence.

To start with Shakespeare, I recently went to to a discussion in the Wickham Theatre in the Drama Department on "Who wrote Shakespeare" chaired by Pam King, Professor of Medieval Literature at Bristol University. There were three speakers: one spoke for the theory that Marlowe was not killed in the brawl at Deptford but went into exile and lived on to write all of the plays attributed to Shakespeare; the second speaker spoke for Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, because he could have written them as the dates fitted, (just) and he had the necessary education, courtly background and opportunities for travel to have written the plays. However there seemed to be no evidence was put forward that he actually did write them.

Andrew Hilton, third speaker and director of the excellent productions of Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory which many of us have been to see, stood up for Shakespeare. He speculated on the reasons for attributing Shakespeare's plays to other authors and came to the general conclusion that Shakespeare's genius makes him a mystery man; there seems to be something in the British makeup that is unwilling to believe in genius.

One member of the audience said he was convinced that there Shakespeare was just an actor who came from Stratford -- so then, who did write the plays ? I asked myself; and why did all these other claimants use the name of Shakespeare to disguise their identity?

Clare Asquith does not query Shakespeare's authorship of all the recognised canon. I found her book interesting because it did make me question my previous ready assumptions that Dissolution of the

Monasteries was on the whole a good thing, and that by Shakespeare's time much of the belief in the 'old faith' was not in the forefront of concern. Neither had I realised previously what a terrible shock the discovery of the Gunpowder plot was to the Old Catholics -- a shock comparable to our shock at the terrorist bomb attacks in London. How could fellow citizens be willing to destroy innocent lives in pursuit of their beliefs?

Similarly Sansom's books brings vividly to life the religious conflicts of Henry's reign. He illustrates dramatically how his policies as 'Defender of Faith' were deeply divisive, and affected the whole structure of society. The last book, "Revelation" is a horrifying revelation of the dangers of polarisation of beliefs, and of sectarianism and prejudice.

I hope that the reason of I have bracketed these books together as recommended reading is clearer; though I realise that not everyone is equally interested in Shakespeare, history and questions of faith and religion.

For a simple, but trenchant summing up of "Who wrote Shakespeare" see "Shakespeare" by Bill Bryson in paperback, pub. Harper Perennial. He writes "So it needs to be said that nearly of the anti-Shakespeare sentiment -- actually all of it, every bit -- involves manipulative scholarship or sweeping misstatements of fact."

I would be very interested to have any feedback, even if only that reading one of these recommended books has given pause for thought on their relevance to some contemporary situations and problems.

Anne Hancock 17th October, 2008

SERMON PREACHED ON HOLY CROSS DAY, 2008 AT ALL SAINTS CLIFTON

By Fr. Alan Moses, Vicar of All Saints, Margaret Street.

“THEN, NOW, NEXT” The title chosen for your festival. Let’s begin with the “then”, some history.

This Feast of the Holy Cross has a rather curious origin. The historian Eusebius, in his *Life of Constantine*, tells how the emperor ordered the erection of a complex of buildings in Jerusalem **“on a scale of imperial magnificence”**, to set forth as **“an object of attraction and veneration to all, the blessed place of our Saviour’s resurrection”**. The supervision of the work was entrusted to his mother, the empress Helena.

In Jesus’ time, the hill of Calvary had stood outside the city; but when the Romans destroyed the city after one rebellion too many and built a new one, the hill was buried under tons of rubble.

During Helena’s excavations a relic, believed to be that of the true cross, was discovered.

Constantine’s shrine included two principal buildings: a large basilica, used for the Liturgy of the Word, and a circular church, known as “The Resurrection” - its altar placed on the site of the tomb - used for the Liturgy of Sacrament.

In the courtyard which separated the two, and through which worshippers had to pass on their way from Word to Sacrament, the exposed top of Calvary’s hill was visible. It was there that the solemn veneration of the cross took place on Good Friday; and it was there that the congregation gathered daily for a final prayer and dismissal after Vespers.

The dedication of the buildings took place on September 14th, 335, the seventh month of the Roman calendar, a date suggested by the account of the dedication of Solomon’s temple, in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar.

Well, here we are celebrating not almost 17 centuries of a church’s existence but only 140, years - but that’s still a long time, longer than any of us will live; 140 years in which much has happened –

including this church being reduced to rubble - not by the legions of Rome but by the Luftwaffe. But out of the ruins arose a new church. Fr. John Gaskell was telling me the other day that he came here when mass was celebrated in the church hall.

If I'm honest, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a place I have mixed feelings about. It's not just the noise and crush inside - the very un-Anglican chaos with all those people pushing and shoving to get to get to the tomb. It's that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a place of Christian conflict; often literally. The different denominations who have a stake in it, seem incapable of getting on. They guard their own rights and encroach on those of others with equal zeal. The keys have to be kept by a Muslim because none of the Christians could be trusted to behave. The Israeli government had inherited from the Turks, via us, the responsibility of keeping the peace. It all sounds a long way from the one who **“though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...”**

I was in Jerusalem in Easter Week a couple of years ago to attend the enthronement of the new Anglican bishop. One morning a number of us were taken to the residence of the Greek Patriarch for an audience. After we were ushered into his study, a monk presented us with huge glasses of brandy - it was only 10am! Fortunately, some equally strong coffee came along later to counter the effects.

The Bishop of Cyprus and the Gulf asked the Patriarch how the negotiations with the Israeli police over the Easter celebrations had gone. They had, he said, been going well, so that many more people should have been able to attend. However, at the last minute, the Armenian Patriarch had taken his ball home, and the whole thing was back to square one. I suppose it is some slight consolation that the Anglican Communion does not have a monopoly of this kind of behaviour.

The Gospel today speaks of the cross drawing people to God. It still does. A living Church draws people to God too. That is our mission. We preach not ourselves but Christ crucified. We preach him not to condemn the world but because God loves the world and desires that all be saved.

Each year, for our summer holiday we go to my sister-in-law's home near Poitiers. Poitiers was one of the great centres of early French Christianity. One of the saints associated with it was St. Radegund. She was an abbess but by no means any old nun. She was a Merovingian princess and had received the gift of a relic of the cross from the emperor in Constantinople.

I like to take among my holiday reading something about France so earlier in the year my eye was caught by a piece in Professor Tony Judt's book of essays and reviews called "**Reappraisals**". It was a review of Pierre Nora's "**Les Lieux de Memoire- Realms of Memory**". Nora's project was born in a time to doubt and lost confidence for France. Fixed reference points were disappearing, the old stability had gone with empire. The unchanging patterns of French rural life were becoming mere museum displays.

There was a need to depict a France passing uneasily from a past still experienced, to one which was just ancient history; to fix a set of national traditions that was slipping beyond the realm of lived memory.

Nora brought together 120 scholars and set them the task of capturing what it is, or was, to be France. He insisted that his project was to be a counter-commemorative history, deconstructing myths and memories. But he ruefully conceded that commemoration had overtaken it.

More than once, he emphasises that France is not just "**utterly unique, but indescribably special**".

Judt brings the trained eye of one of the finest historians of his generation to this work and, while rejoicing in the riches of the project, asks some awkward questions. Which France is being recalled? Which is being ignored? Where is Protestantism? There

is no entry for the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. What of Jewish France and the embarrassing history of Vichy collaboration; rather too close for comfort for many French politicians and Catholic Churchmen. Can France be true to itself and its history if it airbrushes all this out of the group photographs?

This Festival celebrates the history of this parish. This church is “**a place of memory**”: somewhere “**utterly unique, indescribably special**” to those who love it.

But partial memory and selective amnesia are things we must to beware of too. Like France, the tradition of which our parishes have always been part, is living through a period of change and decline; old certainties, old strengths and successes, seem to have slipped away. “**Ichabod**”, we say with the priest Eli's daughter, “**the glory has departed**” from us.

Beset without by secularising trends in national life, and from within by our internal disputes about gender and sexuality and resurgent evangelicalism, we feel stranded in some backwater of history; left with only our memories.

At such a time, there is a strong temptation to retreat into some golden age; some world of neo-Gothic or baroque make-believe. But, as Karl Rahner, the great 20th century Jesuit theologian, warned his fellow-Roman Catholics, we cannot go back to the era of the baroque, no one lives there any more. Those who try to end up inhabiting a fantasy world, not the kingdom of God.

The Cross challenges as well as welcomes and heals. Indeed it heals by challenging. The perfect obedience of Jesus challenges the imperfection of ours. When we celebrate the history of our parishes, it is salutary, that is healthy, for us to acknowledge the negative as well as the positive because we are part of it too. We need forgiveness and healing as much as our forebears. Most, indeed all of us, are here with mixed motives - some noble and virtuous, others less so. The miracle is that God's grace is quite capable of working with that reality. But that grace is able to work

more effectively when we allow it to make us more honest about ourselves.

Churches like ours have always been places for people who did not fit in “St. Suburbia’s” or “The Strict and Particular Tabernacle”. They have given people an entry point into a richer and more glorious spiritual life; a vision of the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty; a transforming relationship with God. They have too been a “safe space” for people much of the church preferred not to talk about and who many in the church today would still prefer did not exist. Let the hearer understand.

The danger of being such a safe space, is that we turn it into our own fortified enclave from which we in turn exclude the “unlike”; those who don’t fit with us. In doing that we lose the vision which places like All Saints exist for. What should be a way station on the road to heaven, becomes a refugee camp of people going nowhere. The worship and prayer which should raise us to the presence of God, becomes simply a familiar comfort or a matter of grim correctness. It helps us to cope with things as they are, with ourselves as we are, rather than transforming them and us into what God would have us be. We appear not as people formed by the cross, but just cross.

THEN, NOW, NEXT.

Now we celebrate 140 years.

What next? Well, there is a board for practical suggestions for the future at the back of church. That is your responsibility, not mine. I have no crystal ball. I cannot predict how we are going to get through the problems facing the church. All I can suggest as a visitor is that if there is to be a future for churches like ours, it will only be found at the cross. We will find it at the cross which reveals the love of God for all, for without that we have nothing to

say, nothing to offer. We will find it at the cross which humbles and challenges us, breaking open our self-centredness.

A Stranger for Christmas

Visits from strangers at Christmas began with shepherds turning up at a Bethlehem stable, and continued with the arrival of wise men from a foreign land. You could carry on this tradition, by inviting an international student to spend Christmas in your home. HOST is a well-established charity, backed by the Foreign Office and many universities, which links adults studying in the UK with hospitable volunteers throughout Britain. Guests come from all over the world, including many from China. They speak English, are keen to share their own culture, while longing to know more about our way of life. Welcoming a student who might otherwise spend Christmas on a deserted campus, fosters international understanding, and will make Christmas special. See www.hostuk.org or call 0207 254 3039, for more information. HOST arranges visits throughout the year, so if your 'inn' is full this Christmas, you can still offer an invitation at another time.

Margaret Stevens

Publicity Officer

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IN THIS MONTH ... NOVEMBER 1982

Festival Flyleaves by A.L.

“But when was All Saints’ Day invented?” I hear you all urgently asking. Well, the story goes like this. As early as the fourth century the Eastern Church had a festival of All Martyrs, on the day we now know as Trinity Sunday. But the tale moves over to Rome in 610, when Pope Boniface IV dedicated what had been the Pantheon (All Gods!) as “St Mary and All Martyrs.” In 731 Pope Gregory III added a Chapel of All Saints, which was dedicated on November 1st. All Saints Day was born.

Mind you, this day already had its own significance. It was widely regarded as the beginning of winter, and in Celtic countries, including ours, it had been New Year’s Day. Hence the November bonfires which antedate the unfortunate Mr Fawkes by many centuries. Moreover, the eve of New Year is universally associated with spooks, and Hallowe’en is simply the Celtic New Year’s Eve still in evidence. Welsh readers may know it as *Nos Galan Gaeaf* (the Eve of the Winter Calends).

November 1st has thus been going strong as All Hallows Day for well over a millennium. It serves two purposes, you may say. In one respect it’s a sort of roll-call. This was the aspect the Middle Ages loved best. Do you remember the old-style “Common of the Saints” with prayers and readings for the different categories? There was Our Lady, of course, then Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, Doctors, Confessors, Virgin-Martyrs, Virgins-not-Martyrs, and finally the grudging title “Those who were neither virgins nor martyrs” – suggesting that, with such slim qualifications, they were lucky to have scraped in at all. Great Scott, Prendergast! You mean to say she was only a housewife?!

And here's an odd thing. It's natural enough for a church to have a statue of its patron saint, but in the Henry VII chapel at Westminster Abbey there are *two* statues of All Saints! Each has civilian-style hair and beard, wears armour like a knight or soldier, is clothed in Mass vestments, has a monastic scapular and hood, carries a book, and holds a stole which binds a dragon at his feet. The one-man-band of hagiology! "All the saints in one solemnity" – so the old collect; but all in one statue, and then another to match! Mr Heath Robinson, one feels, would have been impressed.

The other aspect of this feast, always implicit, but given renewed stress these days, is the opportunity it gives to celebrate the nameless ones. And since the spectacular saints are often difficult to live with, it is a day for honourable mention of housekeepers, domestic chaplains, secretaries, chauffeurs, skivvies, and perhaps even security men. As for spouses, well ...

I suppose it's the "omnes" of the "Come unto me" text that has assured its place for so long as the alleluia verse of Hallow-mas. Do you know the story of the newcomers to heaven who were being given a conducted tour? As they passed a certain room they were all asked if they would mind going on tip-toe. "Sorry about that" they were told afterwards, "but we do like to give everyone the kind of heaven they have always looked forward to, and that room is occupied by members of a very exclusive sect, who think they're the only ones here!"

No, the only qualification for coming on November 1st is that at some time in your life you have known what it is like to wet your couch with tears. Should be a full house.

Churchwarden's Notes

It's a madhouse, you know. Yesterday I arrived soon after dawn to find two gentlemen laying out a carpet on our Alma Vale forecourt by the seat and litter bin. I threatened to charge them rent, and they apologized that they could not lay a red carpet for me. Today I entered the Charnel House in my role as Warden Flammifer, and found myself in contemplation of the statuary. Four of them stood between me and the candles, so I could not help getting close to them. Three gents chatting together in a huddle, pointedly excluding the fourth, slender feminine form. I paused to commiserate with her and saw that, adding insult to injury, she had written across her chest 'Bin Me'. My dear, I sympathise.

While the fine weather lasts, I remember my brief respite in Norfolk. It wasn't quite a pilgrimage, but it had its moments. Norwich Cathedral is nice, and the city has some interesting shops. One in particular attracted me. It isn't a pawn shop, at least, I don't think it is, there were no balls outside, but the variety of wares, mostly second hand and interestingly priced suggested trading at subsistence level. Drawn in by the sight of two Sam Pig books, I ambled around this maze until lo! I came upon my heart's desire, a little brass bell like our low Mass bell, with the Four Evangelists named upon it. So the next time our clapper falls off I can offer a substitute.

On to North Norfolk, and of course to Walsingham. We said hello to the Shrine, but our focus was the Farms Shop (sic); I recommend the meat pies, all of them. Nice wine. From the spirituous to the spiritual: the Orthodox Church has its own wonderful silence and the Slipper Chapel was uncharacteristically quiet. Sadly the corollary to that was that the Longest Ladies' Lavatory block known to me was closed. We discovered Binham Priory: a Church within a ruin. We inspected the Creakes. North Creake was

dauntingly full of Harvesting Ladies: South Creake was empty but the angels welcomed us with a fully equipped tea tray and lots of inviting pricket stands. I renewed my love affair with Little Snoring. The marquee which covers the children's area in Wells next the Sea St Margaret (of Antioch) lifted my wardenly heart. We have many fabric problems at All Saints, but they do not include bat droppings. Laus Deo. Stiffkey stands next to a pair of gates topped with Boars. Otherwise, the beach at Holkham is enormous, the seals on Blakeney Point clearly regarded us as a mobile raree show, the train from Walsingham to Wells carried us past the most fabulous blackberries I have seen in years *and I could not reach them* and wile in Wells I found the sort of second hand bookshop that died out in my early youth. Shan't tell you where it is though – I'm going back. And we discovered that the sign 'Unbridged ford' means 'Road bisected by deep water. Turn round now'.

As we left Walsingham after our final visit on our last day, pretty much churched-out, a cry from my driver alerted me, 'Look, over there in that field. *A ruined church!*' So there's something new to go back for, as well as more tea at S Creake and the Orthodox candles (and the lady outside with corn on the cob 5 for £1), and BOOKS and the Lebanese wine at Holt.

28 September: no rain for the 8 am. Gosh, summer must be over, the downpour has given way to autumnal mists.

6 October: It is so spooky when something from one of my other hats not only relates to ASC but is frighteningly apposite: 'On Wednesday evening, June 2nd, the first of a series of organ recitals which are to take place monthly during term time, was given by Cedric Bucknall, Mus. Bac., organist of All Saints Church, Clifton. The recital was well attended, all the seats in the Great Hall being occupied.' BGS Chronicle June 1880 (I was supposed to be listing Captains of Football, but this was more my thing.'

Well, I trust the portent is good, and that the two days we spent clustered round the Walker organ and choir stalls will duly provide us with a worthy successor to our Cedric. And presto.

No news on the Director of Music front – keep up the candles -, but the Arts Festival went well, and I hope we'll see more of them. By Monday morning the only trace left was a duckling, suspended from the glass walls of the Atrium. This has since met the fate of all high quality ducklings, it has been **EATEN UP**; even yellow fluffy ones taste good to the infant palate!

Well, it's time for the annual diary meeting, when we shall cast your 2009 in tablets of stone, or as it may be, in running water, like the words of wanton women*.

I hope you are all coming to the Theatre with me. See notice in porch, before I take fright and remove it.

*OK Ken, give me the reference – and the Latin.

PS The winner of the caption competition was the charmer who attached to Me-in-the-Pink-Wig 'Because You're Worth It'. I know I am.

All Saints Parish Retreat 2009

Our Parish Retreat is the weekend of February 6-8th 2009 at Abbey House, Glastonbury. Fr Richard Williams, Vicar of St Mary's, Hay-on-Wye, will be our Retreat Conductor this year.

Those of you who have been on our retreats before will be able to extol the virtues of Abbey House to others and encourage them to join us in February. Abbey House is a large, elegant early 19th century house set in

beautiful gardens overlooking the Abbey ruins. It is peaceful, comfortable, warm, and the food is excellent and there is a bar – all to ensure 48 hours of spirituality and ‘winding down’ from the stresses of our everyday life. The delights of Glastonbury with its interesting High Street and the beauties of the countryside are an additional attraction. Many of us take advantage of a weekend in the country to intersperse our spiritual activities with fresh air – and there is always the Tor to climb.

The cost of the Retreat will depend on the number of retreatants. Ideally, we will fill all 20 places and the cost will be around £100 each. Unfortunately, if we are a smaller number we still have to pay for the empty places and this will inevitably increase the cost for those taking part. Time is getting short, so **please think hard about this opportunity** and sign up in the porch. You will not regret it. Perhaps you could bring a friend along as well.

For further details please contact Liz Badman at All Saints, Clifton on 0117-9741355 or allsaintsclifton@tiscali.co.uk

Liz Badman
Parish Administrator

**‘WHY I AM NOT A MEMBER
OF
AFFIRMING CATHOLICISM’**

Speaker:

**The Revd JAMES PATRICK
(Honorary Curate of All Saints with St
John, Clifton)**

Thursday 27 November

In

**The RANDALL ROOM ALL
SAINTS,
PEMBROKE ROAD
CLIFTON, BRISTOL**

7.00 pm Mass

7.45 pm Speaker

ALL WELCOME

THE ATRIUM SEPTEMBER 28TH IN APPRECIATION

JUST like the psalmist, “I opened my mouth and drew in my breath.” In a word, I gasped. And I’m gasping still.

All those people, over a hundred of them, some from a long way. All those cards, enough to fill a poacher’s pockets. A generous bottle from All Saints itself, and fine flasks from farther afield. But above all, the privilege of using the atrium, and the pleasure of seeing so many animated guests enjoying themselves(All Saints-wise) in the maketh-glad-the-heart department, while leaving room for a morsel or two, -- what a famous hymn calls canapé-space.

But hark! What is this? Two simultaneous versions of ‘Happy Birthday.’ Bitonal, did you say? But there’s more! Not far behind, or not – as the would-be linguist put it – “loin de derrière”, comes a new harmonization of that Irish melody, with topical words an’ all, specially commissioned by the choir from our enduring friend Christopher Gower. Thoughtful? Kind? Yes, so was everyone, and not least those who volunteered as victuallers and waiters.

Some lovely surprise photographs have now emerged too. It just never stops. How can a gasp go on so long?

Thank you, All Saints.
Ken



VOLUNTEER EVENING:
THURS 06 NOVEMBER
COME AND FIND OUT IF
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VOLUNTEER FOR OUR
BRISTOL FAMILY CHARITY

CAN YOU SPARE 1 EVENING A MONTH AS A
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DELIVER IT TO OUR WAREHOUSE OR INTO THE
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COME TO: BASEMENT BAR, CHANNINGS PUB,
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TIME: FROM 7:30 TILL LATE, THURS 06
NOVEMBER

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 0117 907 5355, EMAIL:
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**Sermon preached on 18th October 2008 at All Saints, Clifton, by
Fr Paul Spilsbury SSC
to the Ecumenical Friends of Fatima Association**

It is an honour to have been asked to speak to you all today; and a particular pleasure to have Bishop Keith with us. The focus of our meditation lies in events that happened nearly a century ago. In fact, the “centenary period” has already started- Lucia dos Santos was born in 1907, Bl. Francisco Martò in 1908, and Bl. Jacinta in 1910. I first went to Fatima in 1996- the year my father died, he having been born in 1909. It was only a short visit of a few hours, but I brought away with me the then newly published memoirs of Sister Lucia, which filled me in on the story. This year it was a joy to return to Fatima for a longer visit, to participate in the Masses and Rosary processions, to see the cottages at Aljustrel where the little shepherds were children, the church where they were baptised and where Francisco spent so many hours with our Lord, the pathway from the village which is now a Way of the Cross, and so on. I also bought the second volume of Lucia’s memoirs, which do not add much to the account of the Appearances, but which give a charming picture of country life in Portugal a century ago. I would like to underscore this morning what I see as the essence of the message of Fatima, as revealed to those children- should I say, ‘so long ago’, when it was in the lifetime of my parents? When Lucia died only three years ago? No, as revealed to those little shepherds so recently.

I would like to start with the content of the message revealed by the Angel in the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 1916, as it were in preparation for the visit of the Blessed Mother. You will recall that the Angel taught the children this prayer: “My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You. I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You.” We learn from this that our first vocation and duty is to open *ourselves*

to God, in faith, hope and love. Unless we do that, no concern for others will be of any avail. But as soon as we are in a right relationship to God, then our vocation is to pray that others, that all humanity, be in union with the Lord. We implore God's mercy on them, we cannot be content to look to our own salvation, without caring equally for that of others, so many of whom simply do not know God.

The second message of the Angel, in the summer by the well, was, "Make of everything you can a sacrifice and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which he is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners." Here again, there are two parts to the message: the reminder that our self-offering to God can and should be total, that there is nothing too small to lay before him; and that this is to be done in solidarity with all humanity. We are a sinful race, and each one of us can (if we will) do something to repair, to make reparation for, the alienation of mankind from God. This too is to be universal, a plea that *all* sinful humanity may turn back to the Father.

Finally, at the Loka do Cabeço, the Angel taught them a further prayer of adoration to the Holy Trinity, by offering to God the Body and Blood of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. He symbolically gave them Communion (we will leave theologians to argue whether this was a true sacramental Communion), telling the children to make reparation for the sins against the Sacrament committed by ungrateful men, and to "console your God." I will return to this phrase in a moment.

The following year, as we know, from the 13th May to the 13th October, the Blessed Mother herself appeared to the children at the Cova da Iria and at Valinhos. Unlike the visits of the Angel, those of our Lady were real conversations with the children, Lucia both seeing, hearing and speaking, Jacinta seeing and hearing only,

Francisco seeing but not directly hearing. On her first visit, our Lady asked the children whether they were willing to offer themselves to God and bear the sufferings he would send them, to make amends for sin and to convert sinners. On hearing their willingness, she warned them that they would suffer much, “but the grace of God will be your comfort.” She asked them to say the Rosary every day, to end the war and obtain peace.

In essence, the following appearances repeated and reinforced the message. The vision of Hell in July served to underline the urgency of the request to pray for sinners. In this context, we might like to recall some words of the Holy Father in his Encyclical on Christian Hope. He quoted some words of a Vietnamese martyr: “The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind- shackles, iron chains, manacles- are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief.” At the very time our Lady was speaking, the situation in the trenches on the Western Front, and elsewhere, was another sort of hell. The twentieth century was to provide further examples, the most horrific perhaps being found in the concentration camps of the Third Reich. The Pope himself makes this point. “(This letter)” he says, “lays bare all the horrors of the concentration camp, where to the torments inflicted by tyrants upon their victims is added the outbreak of evil in the victims themselves, such that they in turn become further instruments of their persecutors cruelty. This is indeed a letter from Hell.” Later, he speaks of “people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred and suppressed all love within themselves... In such people all would be beyond remedy and the destruction of good would be irrevocable: this is what we mean by the word *Hell*.”

Our Lord died in order that no-one should suffer this terrible fate. In more ways than one “he went down into Hell,” to save sinners. Sartre said that Hell is other people: it is at least true that human beings can make an outward Hell for one another. But far worse is the inner Hell they can make in their own souls. When our Lady asked the children to sacrifice and to make reparation for the conversion of sinners, she was not thinking simply of trivial peccadillos. The hideous totalitarian systems that scarred the last century, and which still linger on in parts of the world, destroyed souls and not just bodies. Fatima is about facing up to the reality of sin and its consequences, the need to turn the world back to God.

Our Lady spoke several times of the “outrage” done to God, to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This “outrage” does not mean that God experiences “rage” or even “hurt feelings” because of human sin. It refers to the way that sin violates the love, the generosity, the sheer *goodness* of God. It refers to the destruction of the divine image in human beings, through their rejection of love. But it is clear from the whole context of the message that this outrage *does not have to be regarded as inevitable*, that it can be repaired and must be repaired. Jesus has already done his part, on the Cross. We are invited, as his friends and his followers, to share the work of reparation with him. Jesus the Lamb of God took the sins of the world upon himself. We must be ready to share the immense burden of human wrong-doing, not to dismiss it as belonging simply to other people. When we make our confession at the beginning of Mass, for instance, we might remember that, sharing in the Priesthood of Christ, we are confessing not just for ourselves, but in the name of all humanity. We are a representative people. We should feel shame and regret for the terrible things human beings do. We are all one family.

The Angel told the children, “Console your God.” Francisco took this very seriously, and frequently went apart, or remained in the

church, “to console the hidden Jesus.” We would be far astray if we interpreted this as meaning, “to cheer Jesus up,” as if our Lord were moping around feeling sorry for himself. Pope Benedict again explains. “The true measure of humanity,” he says, “is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer.” He goes on to say that “the individual cannot accept another’s suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope. Because it has now become a shared suffering... this suffering is penetrated by the light of love.” He then says, “The Latin word *con-solatio*, ‘consolation’, expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude.” In the Garden, Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray with him. This invitation was addressed not just to the three who were with him at that moment, but to all of us who were to come afterwards, including the three little shepherds. Francisco grasped this instinctively. His hours spent with “the hidden Jesus”, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, were his response to the invitation of Gethsemane. He accompanied Jesus in his solitude, his loneliness, and in that way “consoled” his God. Jesus came to share our human pain, so that whoever suffers need never feel that they suffer alone. We “console Jesus” when we accompany him in his sufferings, whether by meditating upon them (for instance in the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary), or when we see him and accompany him in any and every instance of suffering humanity.

And we do this for the conversion of sinners (including ourselves). It is not enough to care for the victims of sin, if we harbour hatred for those who commit it. God does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. Jesus did not come to condemn, but to save what was lost. He died for Pontius Pilate. He died for Caiaphas. He died for Judas. He died also for Adolph Hitler and for Joseph Stalin (and for tyrants still with us). None of us knows for sure who among the dead has finally rejected

God; we certainly know that among the living there is always hope for conversion and salvation. So the responsibility to pray and to sacrifice for sinners is no small one. Let us adore our God, and ask pardon for those who do not adore him. Let us enter into the solitude of the hidden Jesus, which is not something of the long ago, but is with us now. The Mass annihilates space and time, making present to us today the offering that our Lord made once and for all upon the Cross. The opportunity to accompany Jesus in his agony is still ours to take. Together with Mary, let us reflect upon his joys, enter into his sorrows and prepare ourselves to share his glory. Amen.