

## **Fr Hoyal Writes:**

The Advent season is justly popular with church-people, who often say how much they appreciate the Advent hymns.

I too enjoy them, and not just the great blockbusters like *Lo! he comes* and *O come, O come, Emmanuel*.

I particularly like the two well-known “*Hark*” hymns – *Hark! A herald voice is calling* and *Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes*.

More than a thousand years separates these compositions. The first is 6<sup>th</sup> century, the second is 18<sup>th</sup>. But their themes overlap extensively.

I

*Hark! A herald voice is calling;  
‘Christ is nigh,’ it seems to say;  
‘Cast away the dreams of darkness,  
O ye children of the day.’*

*Startled at the solemn warning,  
let the earth-bound soul arise;  
Christ, her sun, all sloth dispelling,  
shines upon the morning skies.*

*Lo! The lamb, so long expected,  
comes with pardon down from heaven;  
let us haste, with tears of sorrow,  
one and all to be forgiven;*

*So when next he comes in glory,  
wrapping all the earth in fear,  
may he then as our defender  
on the clouds of heaven appear.*

*Honour, glory, virtue, merit,  
to the Father and the Son,  
with the co-eternal Spirit,  
while unending ages run. Amen.*  
(‘*Vox clara ecce intonat*’ 6<sup>th</sup>cent)

II

*Hark the glad sound! the Saviour  
the Saviour promised long: [comes,  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
and every voice a song.*

*He comes, the prisoners to release  
in Satan’s bondage held;  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.*

*He comes, the broken heart to bind,  
the bleeding soul to cure,  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to bless the humble poor.*

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,  
thy welcome shall proclaim;  
and heaven’s eternal arches ring  
with thy beloved name.*

(P Dodderidge 1702-51)

Philip Doddridge's *Hark the glad sound!* refers back to the Prayer Book gospel for Advent Sunday – Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, culminating in his cleansing of the temple.

This Passiontide episode translates aptly to our Advent situation. The Lord is coming to his people and deserves to be greeted with acclaim. But beware, those who are defiling his dwelling place in Jerusalem. Rather, "Let every heart prepare a throne, And every voice a song." Every heart is to be purified as a temple of praise fit for his presence.

In the next verse Doddridge describes the Messiah's role as restorer and liberator after the manner of the Book of Isaiah. But he interprets it in spiritual terms as release for prisoners held in Satan's bondage, binding of broken hearts, healing for the bleeding soul, spiritual treasure for the lowly and poor in spirit.

*Hark! A herald voice*, like the incomparable Prayer Book collect for Advent Sunday, is based on Ch 13 of the Letter to the Romans, also read on Advent Sunday. So much so, that you could say the collect is a digest of the reading while the hymn is a metrical version of it.

The light of Christ's coming, this hymn reminds us, inaugurates a day of salvation (and judgement). So we are to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. We are urged to let the bright Sun of Christ's appearing dispel all spiritual sloth.

Doddridge's hymn is a glorious proclamation of the forgiveness and release that the Saviour comes to bring. It celebrates our liberation from Satan's grip, and the mending of bruised hearts and battered souls.

But *Hark! A herald voice* deals with the how of this gift: *Lo! The Lamb, so long expected, comes with pardon down from heaven; let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven.*

This is a felicitous verse to my mind because of its positively joyous attitude to penitence. So great is the excitement at the Lamb's coming from heaven with pardon for sinners, one is drawn almost into a rush to seek forgiveness: *'Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven!'*

Perhaps this is timely, given the general decline in going to confession in recent decades.

The widespread recovery of the sacrament of penance in the Church of England was among the most signal achievements of the Anglo-Catholic movement. Clergy like Richard Randal (first vicar of All Saints 1868-92) and his contemporaries laid the greatest emphasis upon the converting and sanctifying power of confession, as did their successors.

Their patient persistence bore remarkable fruit for decades. For many years All Saints was as a flagship church for sacramental confession. Older church members can still remember queues of penitents before the festivals.

Times and fashions change, yes. But I doubt whether congregations to-day stand in any less need of thoroughness in dealing with sin than their predecessors did. I doubt whether Clifton is more virtuous than it was. Randall and his followers would be both surprised and distressed at how far even a church like ours has fallen away from the practice.

Personal experience has taught me how invaluable the practice of confession is.

It is practical, encouraging and healing. It enables us to face up to things we try to ignore but can't. It is an extraordinarily good means of casting away works of darkness and putting on the armour of light.

It doesn't wave a magic wand over our faults and problems, but it does help us live with them more honestly and more wisely. It is a sacrament we can truly "take to our comfort". And there is a

cumulative effect; it helps people let God's loving mercy heal them towards godly integrity of life.

A vehicle never serviced soon underperforms, and may well become useless or dangerous. A Christian who never truly faces up to himself before God, no hold barred, is likely to go the same way.

Few ways of doing this are simpler and more effective than sacramental confession. A good confession brings joy, peace and renewal to the guilty soul and the troubled spirit.

As we prepare to greet the Lamb of that Bethlehem manger, I do hope we will let the excitement and expectation celebrated in our *Hark* hymns to touch us with new force, not least the exhortation to *haste* – and gladly – *with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven* in readiness for his kingdom.

Oh, and do take a closer look at the hymns themselves. They will repay attention.

With prayers for a Holy and Happy Festival,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard Hoyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CAROL SERVICE For pastoral reasons, this year we have a service of lessons and carols for Christmas on the evening of the Sunday before Christmas – Sunday 20 December at 6 pm. It will be designed to look forward to (rather than in the strict sense anticipate) our Christmas celebrations proper. It will give local people away for Christmas itself, including many of our own church members, the opportunity to enjoy an uplifting Christmas-focused service at *their* church.

## **CHRISTMAS SERVICES AT OUR CARE HOMES**

We are visiting local care homes to hold simple carol and crib services for the residents, in some cases with opportunity for Holy Communion.

We should **greatly** welcome help from church members happy to be friendly (!) and boost our carol singing.

Dates are:

Carlton Mansions, Apsley Road    11 am Saturday 19  
December

Glenavon, St John's Road        7.30 pm   Monday 21  
December

Whatley Court, Whatley Road    10.30 am   Tuesday 22  
December

For further information please contact Fr Richard.

### **All Saints Parish Retreat 2010**

Our Parish Retreat is the weekend of February 5-7 2010 at Abbey House, Glastonbury.

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. There have been changes at the Retreat House and the Trustees have put the cost up, but as a Church Group we still get a good discount. Ideally, we will fill all 20 places and the cost will be around £115 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. **Please think hard about this opportunity** and sign up in the porch. You will not regret it. Where else would you find 48 hours full board in such glorious surroundings for such a low cost? Perhaps you could bring a friend along as well.

We will have to ask for a non-returnable deposit of £30 to book a place, the remainder to be paid on arrival at Abbey House. Please make cheques out to All Saints with St John.

Please sign list in porch.

For further details please contact Liz Badman at All Saints, Clifton on 0117-9741355 or [allsaintsclifton@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:allsaintsclifton@tiscali.co.uk)

*Liz Badman*  
*Parish Administrator*

FEAST OF  
**THE CONCEPTION OF  
THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY**

(AT ALL SAINTS)



**7.30 pm TUESDAY 8 DECEMBER**  
**SOLEMN CONCELEBRATED MASS**  
*Walsingham Cell members and C of E Catholic Societies*  
*attending*  
**All most welcome. Refreshments afterwards.**

**09-11-02 All Souls' Day: Sermon preached by Fr Paul Spilsbury**

It was on All Souls Day, 1865- exactly one hundred and forty four years ago- that John Henry Newman dedicated his great poem *The Dream of Gerontius* to the memory of his friend Fr John Gordon, the first priest of the Birmingham Oratory to die. Most of us know this poem principally as set to music by Edward Elgar, and it is tempting to let some of the musical highlights such as "Praise to the holiest in the height" get in the way of an appreciation of the poem as a whole.

Let me remind you, then, that the poem begins with an old man on his deathbed. He is a Catholic Christian, but by no means a saint, and he is terrified by the thought of dying. With part of his mind he knows that he is being called by Jesus Christ, but with another part he feels that he is falling into nothingness- "This emptying out of each constituent and natural force by which I came to be...as though my very being had

given way, as though I was no more a substance now." He calls on God and on his friends, feeling himself "drop from out this universal frame into that shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss, that utter nothingness, of which I came." Death is a fearful visitant, knocking his dire summons at the door. It is the stuff of nightmares- perhaps nightmares that we all have had at some time or another.

But even as he cries out in his need, he hears his friends around his bedside praying the Litany, invoking the mercy of God, invoking the aid of all the angels and saints. "From the sins that are past; from thy frown and thine ire; from the perils of dying; from any complying with sin, or denying his God, or relying on self, at the last... thy servant deliver, for once and for ever. By thy birth and by thy cross rescue him from endless loss."

Gerontius rouses his strength and makes an act of faith- our familiar hymn, "Firmly I believe and truly." Yet again, he feels himself fail- "That sense of ruin which is worse than pain, that masterful negation and collapse of all that makes me man." He asks Jesus to send him some angel, such as came to him in his own agony. His friends pray more fervently, and he resigns himself into the hands of God: "O Lord, into thy hands."

Suddenly (and here at least who can forget Elgar's wonderful music?) the voice of the priest rings out like a trumpet: "Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul! Go from this world! Go in the name of God the omnipotent Father, who created thee! Go in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Son of the living God, who bled for thee! Go in the name of the Holy Spirit who hath been poured out upon thee!" And Gerontius goes.

But where does he go? On All Souls' Day, that is perhaps our unspoken question. Where do we go, when we leave this earth? Where are our loved ones, and how can our love reach out to them? The first part of Newman's poem takes place here on earth, it is the description- albeit

dramatised- of an actual deathbed. What follows in the second part is the Dream, Newman's poetic imagination of what comes afterwards. Yet to the Dreamer, it is more as if this whole earthly life was the dream, and he has now awakened. "I went to sleep... I had a dream; yes- someone softly said 'He's gone'; and then a sigh went round the room." The Dreamer feels refreshed, wrapped in a great stillness. He hears no more the busy beat of time. He is suddenly aware of being supported by angelic hands, carried forward swiftly, conscious of a music and harmony beyond anything he can describe.

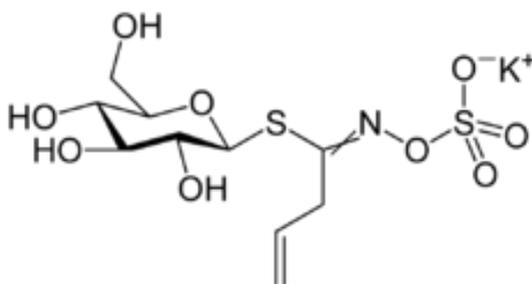
His guardian angel tells him, first, that he is safe and can never again cherish the least impulse that he ought not to. Precisely because in life his will was ultimately submissive to God- however imperfectly he fulfilled that will- he is safe and has no need to fear any more. Secondly, he is no longer subject to space or time, and what he now experiences has no relation to the limits of the material world. Thirdly, he is still to come before the Judge who is also his Saviour.

At the climax of the poem, and of the Dream, Gerontius sees Christ, and becomes aware of the immeasurable gap between himself and the holiness of God. Who can see God and live? Dazzled and blinded, he begs to be taken away to have his self-inflicted wounds healed, all those deliberate and half-deliberate sins and negligences which have left scars upon his soul. But just before this moment, he hears again the voices of the friends around his deathbed, praying for him; and he hears the Angel of the Agony reciting all the mental and physical pains the Lord endured in his Passion, that human beings might be rescued from the dangers they put themselves in, and healed from the injuries they inflict upon themselves.

Finally, the guardian angel assures Gerontius that angels will tend and nurse him until he is fit to gaze properly on God, and Masses on earth and prayers in heaven will aid him at the throne of the Most High.

Newman's Dream; a dream that expresses in poetic form our faith. This is why we are here, on All Souls' Day: to offer Masses on earth, and to invoke the prayers of the Saints in heaven, for our loved ones who have departed this life (and even for those who have no-one else to pray for them). We are told that we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out. Nothing material, maybe, but we can take the love of our friends, their continued concern for our welfare. And our love, and our concern for the welfare of our loved ones is expressed this very day, and every day, in our prayers, and by our uniting ourselves with the Offering of Jesus Christ, who died and yet lives for ever. We do not know how their present existence relates to our space and time; but we do know that to God all are alive. And we know that whatever they still stand in need of, our prayers can aid. Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord... and let light perpetual shine upon them.

### Molecule of the month: Sinigrin $C_{10}H_{16}KNO_9S_2$ (2-propenylglucosinolate)



Sinigrin belongs to the glucosinolate family, a class of organic compounds which occur as secondary metabolites in almost of all plants in the Order Brassicales.

Why should we care? Sinigrin is pertinent to the Christmas season as it is the substance responsible for spoiling Christmas for children and others who do not enjoy their greens. It is what makes overcooked sprouts smell and taste like dodgy drains. To avoid possible domestic discord, it is possible to avoid release of sinigrin by boiling your sprouts for less than six minutes, or indeed by choosing a more interesting cooking method. If you prefer a sloppier sprout, but wish to mask the sulphurous fumes, chuck a couple of bayleaves in the water.

### **Gadgets for God**

The Ship of Fools Website <http://www.ship-of-fools.com> has an excellent selection of seasonal and pertinent items for your perusal and purchase.

<http://www.acquasantieraelettronica.it/eng.htm> will allow you to purchase a handy holy water autostoup, designed to protect the faithful from the H1N1 virus. On placing the palm of the hand under a gadget which would probably look more at home in a gentlemen's public convenience, the faithful one receives a measured drop of holy water suitable for transfer to finger and forehead.

To perk up a tired collection of Christmas tree baubles, visit the York Minster online shop <http://www.yorkminster.org/shop/christmas/> and order a pair of Archbishops to hang on your tree. Although both are 19 cm by 7cm, Rowan Williams costs a mere £6.50, whereas John Sentamu is an unaccountably more costly £6.99.

Heralded as being perfect for Baptist churches where a water-resistant nativity set might be a prudent purchase, is Amazon's nativity rubber duck set <http://www.ship-of-fools.com/gadgets/seasonal/210.html>

## **Our Website**

The All Saints' website <http://www.allsaintsclifton.org/> has undergone minor reorganization to make it easier to navigate. There is now a worship button which will take you straight to special services, the weekly service pattern, and a new feature, the week's pewslip in pdf format.