

*Fr Hoyal Writes*

**‘SEEK and ye shall FIND’**

This is our overall theme for Lent. In full, the quotation is: ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ (*Matthew 7.7*).

But seeking can sometimes be self-serving rather than God-serving and neighbour-serving. Lent can degenerate into a spiritually shallow quest for self-improvement rather at odds with the call to deny self and follow Christ along the way of the Cross.

Peter Chrysologus, 5<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Ravenna, aptly applies the Lord’s words about asking, seeking and knocking to the traditional duties of Lent: prayer, fasting (self-denial) and almsgiving (acts of mercy and generosity). He says:

“There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated... If you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, then hear the petition of others...

If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy yourself. If you look for kindness, show kindness yourself. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery.

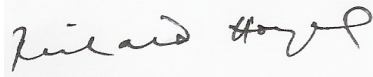
Let this be the pattern for all when they practise mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you.

Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others.  
Let us offer our souls in sacrifice by means of fasting...

[*To make our offerings*] acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to earth... if you do not release the springs of mercy, your fasting will bear no fruit.

When you fast, if your mercy is thin your harvest will be thin; when you fast, what you pour out in mercy overflows into your barn. Therefore, do not lose by saving, but gather in by scattering: give to the poor, and you give to yourself. You will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others.”

Fifteen centuries on, these blunt but godly words certainly speak to me. Our seekings must not be divorced from continuing obligations in prayer, self-denial and practical generosity. On the contrary, we must particularly seek to be more prayerful, less self-concerned, and more willing to give and share.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard Hooker".

## **HOT POTATOES**

For citizens at large, one of these is a rather small potato and hardly warm. The general public sees no reason for delay on women bishops. Just to update following the recent General Synod meeting, the move by traditionalists to gain acceptance of the Archbishops' compromise amendment of 2010 failed. Synod has asked the House of Bishops not to make any substantial amendments to the measure to ordain women bishops that won strong approval at diocesan synods last year. The outcome is still uncertain, but effective provision for traditionalists looks less likely. July will tell.

The government's intention to introduce same-sex marriage is a much hotter potato, and public opinion is more divided. A consultation period is about to start.

Already the Archbishop of York (John Sentamu) has made a spirited attack on the plan, followed by Lord Carey, who is backing the newly-formed Coalition for Marriage. The Church of Scotland has come out against the proposals, and the Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops in England and Wales has expressed strong opposition. But there is a good deal of support in the country generally.

This one will run and run, and there may well be more heat than light. But it is eventually public opinion that will decide, whatever churches may feel. Politicians like to be on the winning side.

Just one comment at this stage: it is perfectly possible to take a very positive view of civil partnerships and committed same-sex relationships, and yet maintain cogently that marriage as such (as universally understood hitherto) is inherently and properly a relationship between those of opposite sex.

In this respect it is worth noting that Dr Sentamu has pointed out that bishops in the House of Lords did **not** seek to obstruct the introduction of civil partnerships between same-sex couples in 2004.

## **PARISH LUNCH UPDATE**

We are all very grateful to those who take turns to cook and help at our popular parish lunches. Having held our prices for some years, rising costs mean that we have had to increase ticket prices to £6 for adults and £12 for a family ticket (parents and their children under 16). This remains great value.

Parish lunch dates for 2012 are:-

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March – Mothering Sunday

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October – Harvest Supper

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November

Make a note now. Tickets are on sale for two Sundays beforehand. Our lunches are always hugely enjoyable and a great chance to get together and meet new friends. A pay bar is provided by the All Saints Society. If you haven't been before, why not come along?

*Janice Hopkins on behalf of the Social & Welcoming Committee*

## **DEDICATION FESTIVAL**

On Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July we will be celebrating the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of the rebuilt All Saints. As something different we will be providing drinks and nibbles after our 11am mass and hope that everyone will want to join in to toast this special 'birthday'.

The following Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July we are planning a late afternoon barbeque in the church garden for the whole church family,

young and old. More news later but in the meantime book the date in your diary.

*Janice Hopkins on behalf of the Social & Welcoming Committee*

## **LENT CHARITIES 2012**

### **WaterAid -Jars of Change Appeal**

WaterAid is an international non governmental organisation. Their mission is to transform lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities.

Jars of Change is WaterAid's Lent appeal and challenge to fill a jar or jars with coins and notes to provide technologies like rainwater harvesting, thereby providing a safe supply of water to the people in Rwanda where 35% of the population are without drinking water.  
[www.wateraid.org.uk](http://www.wateraid.org.uk)

### **The Rainbow Centre for children**

The centre is situated in Knowle and provides a haven of peace for children who are suffering from the effects of bereavement, cancer and life threatening illness.

The children and their families are supported through Play, Music, and Art Therapy together with Counselling and group work.

All the services to families are provided free of charge. The charity receives neither government nor lottery funding and depends entirely upon donations to provide the funds necessary to cover their costs each year.

[www.rainbowcentre.org.uk](http://www.rainbowcentre.org.uk)

**Collections from our Lent appeal will be divided equally between our two Lent charities 'WaterAid' and 'Rainbow Centre for Children'.**

### **ADMISSION AND LICENSING OF LAY MINISTERS**

This year's service of Licensing of Lay Ministers was on a Saturday morning – 18 February, in Bristol Cathedral – so I was able to go, for the first time since I was licensed on 21 October 2006.

There were nine people to be licensed, seven women and two men, by Bishop Lee. Licensed Lay Ministers (LLMs) are asked to attend these occasions to support the candidates. As recently elected joint Sub-Warden for LLMs in the Bristol West Deanery with Dianne Yeandel (from Holy Trinity, W-o-T), I felt it was imperative I should be there. I was surprised there weren't more of us to support and affirm our new Lay Ministers.

It was a wonderful occasion, and I arrived early so that I could be on my own for a while. I was able then to read quietly and remind myself of the Declaration of Assent which all new LLMs must affirm before they can be licensed, and I made the Declaration in 2006. In short we:

1. Affirmed and declared our belief in the faith which is revealed in Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness, in public prayer using only forms of service authorised by Canon.
2. Give due obedience to the Bishop of Bristol and his successors in all things lawful and honest.
3. Promise to endeavour to promote peace and unity, and to conduct ourselves as becomes a worker for Christ for the good of the Church, and for the spiritual welfare of all people. Give due obedience to the minister in whose care we serve in all things lawful and honest.

It was good to reflect on these again. When I was licensed we were told that if we did not agree to **2** we could not be licensed.

The service started promptly at 10.30 am and led by the crucifer and acolytes and choir, we processed from the Elder Lady Chapel, down the South Choir Aisle across the back and down the centre aisle to our seats. There is a lovely tradition at the Cathedral on these occasions for clergy and LLMs to walk in procession together. (At the Chrism Mass I am the only one from All Saints so usually attach myself to a friendly Parish and walk in with them). The final procession was the candidates with their parish priests.

Sam Rushton, who is warden of Readers for Bristol Diocese, preached an excellent sermon telling us we should preach a radical message. She took as her text James 3 'The tongue is a fire', and said, *"We are used to the idea today that 'radical clerics' have the power to incite evil acts of murder and terrorism. Have we forgotten that radical preachers of God's holy Word also have the power to transform lives for the good: to give hope to the hopeless, love to the unloved, joy to the dispirited."*

She also reminded us that people may not remember a word of what we have preached, but they *will* remember how we preached it and how we live it. If we are out of sorts with God, if we hold a grudge against someone it will come out in our preaching.

That is something to think about.

The candidates were then Presented, Questioned, Admitted and Licensed and given their New Testaments and licenses by Bishop Lee. It is very like an Ordination service, though the Candidates do not have hands laid on them.

Musically, the service was uplifting and strong with the hymns 'Thy hand, O God, has guided'; 'In Christ alone my hope is found'; 'Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father'; 'Go at the call of God'; The anthem was Rutter's 'O clap your hands together' and the voluntary was Widor's Finale (Symphonie 2).

I came away feeling affirmed and renewed in my ministry, firmly rooted in the Diocese and the Church of England, and ready to preach and live the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Liz Badman*

## The Destructive Power of Christ

*Sermon preached at Solemn Mass by Canon Brendan Clover 29*

*January 12 Mark 1.21-28*

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'You must face up to your personal demons.' This is the sort of advice which is given to people who seem to have been taken over by some powerful addiction, whether it is drugs, alcohol, shopping or just a deep personal hatred against someone. They are in the grasp of some supra-human power which they cannot control but must eventually face and defeat.

But there are also situations in which whole societies, usually totalitarian, seem to be possessed by a demonic power which drives them on to places like the killing fields in Cambodia or to create the destructive machines of National Socialism which lead to Dachau and its incinerators. Such societies have been taken over by a dominating diabolic power.

This is how St Mark sees the world into which Jesus comes. It was not neutral ground, but occupied by Satan. The Messiah will have to be involved in this cosmic battle. Read St Mark's Gospel through and you will discover that the whole Gospel is shaped in these terms.

The first challenge which Jesus faces is a struggle with Satan for forty days in the desert. And as soon as he emerges from this encounter he announces the coming of the kingdom of God. It will break into this world through his ministry. Once Jesus has called his disciples the first action he performs is an exorcism. And this incident with all its dramatic details dominates the first day of his ministry.

In today's Gospel Jesus goes to teach in the synagogue at Capernaum. People are astounded at the authority of his teaching for he not only proclaims the kingdom of God in words but he demonstrates in his actions how the kingdom of Satan will be defeated.

Immediately he clashes with the evil spirit which possesses one of the congregation, and just as quickly the demon becomes aware of the



presence of holiness in Jesus. It is as though the presence of the Holy One draws out the evil forces from the woodwork. But it is interesting to see how the demon first recognises Jesus; it is not as the forgiver of sins or the healer of the sickness but as the Destroyer. 'Have you come to destroy us?' the demon demands. Holiness has a destructive as well as a creative power as it lays the truth bare.

Then Jesus, the Holy One of God, exercises his authority and by the power of his word silences the spirit and orders it to leave the man so that he is free. The drama is not yet finished. As the evil spirit violently shakes his victim and screams in defeat, the kingdom of Satan is pushed back by the destructive power of Jesus.

Imagine such a scene today at a Sunday Mass - supernatural conversations, shouts from the exorcist and a writhing body in the sanctuary as the screaming devil departs. Not what one expects in church on a Sunday! But such an incident might make us aware that Jesus was not just fighting against visible forces but his struggle was very much as St Paul described it:

*Our battle is not against human forces but against the rulers and authorities and their dark powers that govern the world. We are struggling against the spirits and supernatural forces of evil.*

Brothers and sisters we must own this aspect of the Gospel tradition whether we like it or not. In our sophisticated society we may be embarrassed with all this talk of demons and Satan. Surely we have moved on from such simplistic dualisms? We may have moved on in the ways we explain, in modern medical terminology, some of the manifestation of disease and sickness, but a brief glance at any newspaper will remind us that the presence of evil is still very much present in our society.

The good news of this Gospel is that for individuals with their personal demons, and for societies with their collective addictions, Christ can still exorcise these demons.

We are told as early chapter three in Mark that Jesus provoked so much hostility that his enemies 'sought ways to destroy him.'

We know at the end of the Gospel Jesus faced these powers of evil and defeated them on the Cross. Through the power of the Risen Christ the Church now gives us access to both his destructive and creative power.

Really!

Where and how?

At Sunday Mass, I say, and through the other sacraments; through anointing and the laying on of hands; through prayer, fasting and self denial; as we make our confessions, and in so many other ways, Jesus can bring his Kingdom nearer, and rout the foe.

*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?*