

**March 2014 thoughts, from Father Charles:**

## ***Through a Lenten Lens***

The Season of Lent is nearly upon us. Ash Wednesday (5 March) commences the season as one of the two Greater Fasts (the second being Good Friday). The tradition of 'Ashing' is long; formerly public penitents would come to their place of worship in penitential clothing and bare feet, and be accompanied by a gaggle of friends and supporters. Now, of course, all worshippers step forward for the imposition of ashes and to hear the words "*Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.*" An important first step of Lent, in which we are reminded of our place in God's creation.

### **What's Happening During Lent?**

There are quite a few activities during Lent this year and all are linked by the notion of 'looking'. This is very much a feature of the recommended Lent Book (***'Looking Through the Cross'*** by Graham Tomlin) and described elsewhere in this magazine. Hence also, the idea that sits at the heart of 'Through the Lenten Lens'.

Here's a brief outline of the activities during Lent:

- ***'Easter in Art; An Exploration'*** This will take place at each Tuesday evening Mass. We will produce a booklet containing a series of pictures each depicting an event from Holy Week. These pictures will provide us with an opportunity to look 'at' and look 'through' the image to channel our thoughts and gain insight. After Mass there will be an opportunity for a coffee and discussion on the homily/address. Please note that the Tuesday Mass will be at 1930 (and not 1900).
- ***'Friday Reflections'*** During Mass on each Friday of Lent Fr Peter will distribute and use a prayer with reflections. As is usual for the Friday 1030 worshippers, Fr Peter will invite people to join him for coffee and biscuits afterwards with the opportunity to extend the discussion and reflection.
- ***'Stations of the Cross'*** Friday evening, each week, at 1900, until 11 April. Each week the Stations will be led by one of us, and each week will be a slightly different style according to the meditative perspective of the 'leader'.
- ***'Music and Readings for Lent'*** On the evening of Sunday 23 March (at 1800) we will again engage an alternative perspective through an auditory lens (if such a thing exists). Our Director of Music, John Davenport, is constructing a short evening act of devotion which will provide another way of 'seeing' meaning as we prepare ourselves for the Easter celebration.

- **'Sundays in Lent'** The six Sundays in Lent will also follow the theme using the reading provided by the Gospel of the day. Each of the Gospel readings gives a different 'view' of Jesus, where we can look 'at' him as teacher or prophet; or look 'through' him as a lens which changes our perception of the world, in terms of power over death or God becoming subject to man.

One Sunday will be different. **Mothering Sunday**. We will have a different theme for the Joint Mass at 1030 on Mothering Sunday (30 March). I am really pleased to say that Fr Kim will be with us to both preach and celebrate on this day. (Don't forget it's also the day the clocks change!)

### **The Lenten Lens**

So, a good deal of activity during Lent. All built, in different ways, around our ability to really deepen our understanding - through 'looking'. If I was to offer a 'strap line' for this Lenten theme it would be something like:

*'Deepening our faith by looking at and looking through'*

With every blessing



### **BASKETS WANTED!**

The children from St John's School are coming to All Saints for an end of term 'Easter' service on Monday 31st March. We shall have palm crosses for each child, which are to be blessed at the service. We need baskets to put them in, so if you have a largish (shopping-sized) one you could lend then please let me know, tel 9249203.

*Jessica Smith*

## What price clean pure water?

With the recent very wet weather we have had over the last weeks and months, water can't be far from our minds. We're saturated from it in more senses than one. The gospel reading for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent this year (March 23<sup>rd</sup>) is the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, and may cause us to break from thoughts of the tiresomeness of perpetual rain to what water means, both as a necessity of life and as a spiritual metaphor.

We probably waste around £2 billion a year on bottled water, when the kitchen tap provides a safe alternative that tastes perfectly good. Sales of mineral water have been doubling every five years

since the first Perrier adverts of the 1970s, and more than 2 billion litres are now sold each year.

A litre of bottled water might cost in excess of £1, while the same money will buy 10,000 litres of mains water. The environmental cost is high, too. Our beaches, as well as our streets, are strewn with plastic bottles and containers. Small particles of these, when consumed by sea birds, poison them. An even more serious consideration, perhaps, is that some bottled water is shipped here from the other side of the world from countries where the indigenous population do not have access to a safe water supply - Fiji, for example, where most of the population suffer the ill effects of typhoid. On the other hand, bottled water is very useful during crises like the recent floods, and, aside from disaster, it encourages us to drink water rather than sugary drinks. The overwhelming evidence, however, is stacked against it. The provision of clean water is an essential requirement for life and we are very lucky to have it in this country, even if it doesn't taste as good as we'd like it to here in Bristol. The plain truth is that some of us are able to treat water as a luxury while others die from lack of it.

Jesus, parched and weary, gets into conversation with this Samaritan woman at the well. It's necessary to know some background detail to this encounter. Jesus and his disciples were travelling back to Galilee from Judea. The safest way would have been to avoid Samaria and go round via the Jordan Valley and Jericho. They took the shorter route through Samaria, which was more dangerous. Jews passing through Samaria risked being beaten up and mugged. The Jews and the Samaritans had become enemies for political and historical reasons which, as ever, had very little to do with true religion. Jesus and the twelve get as far as Jacob's well, (still there just outside the city of Sychar,) and the disciples go off to buy food. (They would have had to have been very hungry indeed to buy food from Samaritan sources.) So there is Jesus, alone by the well, in the midday heat, tired and thirsty, and along comes the woman on her own to fetch water, a task usually done by women early in the morning before it got too hot, so we know straightaway that there must be a reason this woman comes in the middle of the day. It's because she is an outcast who can't face any company at the well. The other women of her neighbourhood know what she's like and they shun her. She has to sneak out when they are either taking a siesta or gathering indoors for a gossip.

The most usual practice here would have been for Jesus and this woman to ignore each other. Even men and women from the same tribe didn't speak to each other unless they had been introduced. But this is Jesus, friend of sinners, seeing potential in the sinner, seeing beneath the layers by which others judge her. He speaks to her first, asking for a drink. Asking for a drink from the vessel of a Samaritan woman! Just the sort of person he *would* choose, of course - rejected, needy, lonely, ashamed. And how does he treat her? He draws her to himself, not by telling her what he can do for her, but by commanding her in the way he did his first disciples.

He tells her that she can do something for him: give him a drink of water. When would have been the last time anyone demanded act of kindness from her? Imagine what that small request from Jesus meant to her! At first it no doubt meant awkwardness and embarrassment; he knows all about her. She's had five husbands and is now shackled up with yet another man. The unease between them swiftly passes, however, as the Lord reveals himself to her.

Jesus initiates the conversation with a straightforward human requirement for a drink of water. He ends it, though, with an I AM statement – one of the sayings in John's gospel by which he reveals his divinity. "I know that the Messiah is coming ... When he comes he will proclaim all things to us," she tells him. Jesus replies "I AM he, the one who is speaking to you." Jesus very deftly leads the woman in this encounter from what she knows already to what she truly longs for. He starts with water as a basic physical need. What must there have been, in his gaze as well as in his words, to enable her to see that he could quench her much greater thirst? Why doesn't she worry that this man might spread even more rumours about her? It must have been because the love in his words and in his gaze gave her hope, grace, dignity and respect, making a fountain of living water spring up in her soul that destroys her sin and gives her the courage to reach out to others.

Her understanding began, though, from already knowing how precious and necessary water is. She had to have water even though it meant fetching it daily at the most uncomfortable hour of the day.

"Give me this water" she says "so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." She can't imagine anything more wonderful than an unending supply of running water –

living water as it would have been called in the time of Jesus. Clean water that wasn't stagnant or brackish and didn't spread disease.

Perhaps we need to start from where she started. We take clean water for granted. We exploit poorer countries and we are greedy and selfish while others lack the basic necessities of life. It cannot be right that we waste water, the essence of physical life, while others are made sick or die for lack of a clean water supply. Lent is a good time to be thinking about such matters – counting our blessings and making a real effort to be more considerate and generous to those who have so much less than we do. The encounter between Our Lord and the Samaritan woman is a timely reminder. More than that, though, we need also to be ready, like the Samaritan woman, to understand the deeper meaning of what Jesus is saying. Later on in John's gospel (John 8:37), when Jesus is at a festival with the disciples he cried out to anyone who would listen, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."'

*Jessica Smith, Parish Lay Minister*

## Lent Charities 2014

It is our tradition to gather up all the money we would have spent on those indulgent things we are denying ourselves for Lent and to give it to charity. As always we are supporting one overseas and one local charity, and the PCC have picked two excellent causes for this year.

### **One25**

One25 reaches out to women trapped in, or vulnerable to, street sex work, supporting them to break free and build new lives away from violence, poverty and addiction.

A One25 worker says "The women often make first contact with One25 through meeting us during outreach. Our van goes out five nights per week and provides nutritious food, hot drinks and a chance to talk and get advice in a safe space. We give access to a mobile phone to contact emergency hostels, information on 'ugly mugs' (perpetrators of street violence), warm clothes, personal alarms, first aid, condoms and more. Once a week experienced staff and volunteers go out on foot to speak individually with the women, especially the younger women who are sometimes more reluctant to open up on the van in front of others"

A woman helped says:

*"Out there on the streets, not many people have time for us; we are often subjected to verbal, physical and sexual abuse daily. After years of humiliation, self-hatred and just living a nightmare constantly, we start to believe this stuff and lose all hope of anything else. You believe in us, you see the beauty inside us, you know we are worth so much more, you are our guardian angels. I hope One25 will always be there for women on the streets still suffering, love you all xxx."*

To read more about the charity, visit  
<http://www.one25.ltd.uk>

### **Stepping Stones Nigeria**

Stepping Stones Nigeria's (SSN) work saves, protects and transforms the lives of thousands of vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including those who are caught up in the child witch culture. They are a small and effective charity that works from a child-rights approach. They do everything in their power to ensure that children in the Niger Delta get a proper education, healthcare, food and protection.

They believe that the long-term solutions to the Niger Delta's problems lie in the hands of the people of the region so they identify, nurture and support local community organisations to help the many children who need them. SSN partners with these organisations to make the world aware of the issues that the children they work with face on a daily basis, and pressures governments to fulfil their responsibilities to these children.

All of their partner organisations are run by inspirational Nigerians whose work goes a long way to dispel the negative stereotypes that are often held by people from outside of Nigeria. They all share a commitment to upholding the highest standards in accountability, transparency and effective service delivery. Above all, they work tirelessly to bring positive change to the lives of some of the most needy children on the planet.

Read more about the charity and its achievements at <http://www.steppingstonesnigeria.org>

So, do assess your luxuries, be they a regular stiff gin of an evening, that sly bar of chocolate, a shopping habit, having yourself slathered in mud at the Lido, wafting about in a flotation tank full of salt water or whatever and donate the proceeds to our worthwhile causes.

## Turning thoughts into actions

### **The thought:**

'I wish we had a study or prayer group for parents who go to the 9.30'

### **The action:**

Instead of just thinking, this intrepid thinker took the plunge and spoke to other 9.30-ers about his idea and it turned out that a couple of others had been thinking the same thing.

We got together and talked about what we wanted from a group, what we'd liked and loathed about groups we'd tried before. We wanted more people to join us but realised that we'd better start by finding a time, day of the week and frequency that we could all commit to if we wanted to get the group off the ground.

The next big question was what were we going to do? We knew that we wanted a self-led Bible study group but where to start? The Bible is dauntingly big! So, we asked an expert, a priest who has tonnes of experience with all sorts of successful groups and he helped us work out a format and suggested that we start with Mark's Gospel on the basis that it's the shortest and easiest to understand.

This is the plan we came up with...

- 8pm start (gives time to get kids to bed)
- Tea/Coffee + biscuits + general chat (we wanted to get to know each other)
- Start with the collect for the 3rd Sunday before Christmas
- Read + discuss a section(s) of Mark's Gospel (using notes in study bibles and google if we're really stuck)
- Lord's Prayer (the classic way to bring things to a close)
- 9pm finish (no late finishes, we're all up early in the morning)

Has it worked?

In short, yes. A year has passed, the group has doubled in size and we are still meeting every fortnight. The group has become something we all look forward to and, most importantly, our understanding of the Bible and Jesus' teachings is

growing steadily.

Why am I telling you all this?

In part because it really wasn't hard to do, we didn't have to ask anyone for permission, we just did it and so could you! We also realised early on that size wasn't terribly important, as long as there are three of us (it doesn't even matter which three) the group works. Having said this we are always on the lookout for those who might want to join our merry band, if you'd like to come along and try the group out, let me know and I can give you the details (ce.hopkins@hotmail.co.uk) . You do not need to come to the 9.30 or be a parent, everyone is welcome.

*Charlotte Hopkins*

**'SEE NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME; SEE NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION'**

**Our Parish Retreat, led by Canon Wendy Wilby**

Over the years we have had varied, interesting and excellent retreats. They have developed as we as a group have developed. Worship is at the heart of the Retreat with the Daily Offices of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline, with a daily Mass, and Benediction on the Saturday evening. This year members of the Daily Office Team were responsible for organising and leading the offices.

A booklet was also produced which gave the programme and all the Offices with Psalms and Readings, so that there wasn't any panic halfway through because some had the 'wrong' book.

Some past Retreats that come to mind are:

'Gateways of Life' Led by Sr Margaret Magdalen

A wonderful Celtic style retreat in 2009 led by Fr Richard Williams from Hay-on-Wye

'Praying through Difficult Times – Toby and his Dog' This was a very popular retreat led by Fr Thomas Seville CR in 2011

Last year we were introduced to Wilderness Spirituality by Canon James Wilson.

Some of our retreats and conductors don't always suit everyone, but that is part of our spiritual journey and we should respect them and others hard work and views. We are all at different places on our spiritual journeys

This year's Retreat has had a 100% positive feedback, though for some of our more conventional retreatants it took time to finally settle into the theme. Canon Wendy is an experienced retreat conductor, and for All Saints this was the first time we had been led by a woman priest. Some of us are used to worshipping with women priests and also with Quiet Days etc. We were also fortunate to have Fr Charles with us for part of the time

We were encouraged to expand the Offices by using music, focal points, art works etc. Most did not take up the challenge, but Friday's Evening Prayer had icons, candles and introductory music by Hildegard of Bingen.

Canon Wendy introduced us to some different types of meditation exercises, most of which I and some others were familiar with, though there were some who found it difficult to relax into them at first.

We were introduced to the subject of Time by realising that we are slaves to Time, but to remember that the Present Moment feels special, Time flows and the Present is always reproducing itself.

*“What is time?” St Augustine replied: “If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who does ask me, I do not know.”*

St James Epistle tells us that Time is a gift. We have a responsibility because we are stewards of this gift from God.

We need to settle our priorities and seize the opportunities. In our time – human time – there are boundaries. In God’s time, time is limitless. Our time and God’s time meet at a trapdoor, open the trapdoor and there is a deep well, the meeting place of God and us, the Eternal Now.

*O present moment, you belong to me, whole and entire.*

*I desire to use you as best I can.*

*And although I am weak and small,*

*You grant me the grace of Your omnipotence.*

*And so, trusting in Your mercy,*

*I walk through life like a little child,*

*Offering You each day this heart*

*Burning with love for Your greater Glory.*

*(St Faustina)*

In the second address we were reminded that the Night is impossibly long for some, Time stretches, they wait for the Dawn. People who wait are ‘Saturday People’ and this can last for years. We must trust in waiting with God with faith. Jesus is standing before us and he looks at us with Love and Humility.

Henri Nouwen in ‘Seeds of Hope’ says: ‘To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude towards life. So it is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God moulds us according to God’s love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are beyond our own imagination, fantasy or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.’

Jean-Pierre de Caussade ‘Sacrament of the Present Moment’: ‘The present moment holds infinite riches beyond your wildest dreams but you will only enjoy them to the extent of your faith and love. The will of God is manifest in each moment, an immense ocean which the heart only fathoms in so far as it overflows with faith, trust and love. It is in his purpose, hidden in the cloud of all that happens to you in the present moment, that you must rely.’

We ended the session with a 10 minute breathing exercise

In the third address Canon Wendy told us ‘silence is like honey’. We were each given a raisin (I saw some raised eyebrows and smirks at this point!) and she asked us to examine it, to see light on the wrinkles, to smell it, to place it on our tongues, chew it, taste its sweetness and swallow it. This was an exercise in the awareness of the senses.

Being aware of our senses brings us closer to the Creator and brings us closer to the present moment. S I F T = Sensation, Images, Feelings, Thoughts. It brings our minds back to focus on God. Our senses help us feel God within us. For this session Canon Wendy used candles, lots of them, smells and also a carved labyrinth. The Gathering music was Morten Lauridsen's *O Nata Lux*.

In our fourth session on 'Listening to Scripture', we were reminded that breathing properly makes us alert, awake and poised for anything. We need to listen and be open to God. Canon Wendy also introduced us to Lectio Divina:

1. Read slowly and let it sink in
2. Reflection – ruminates on it; take from it what it sends us.
3. Response – let our hearts speak to God
4. Let God speak to our deepest selves.

Our final address on Sunday morning was 'Seizing the day'. This is the time to plant seeds, everyday is a new beginning, so put yesterday aside. Sanctify this moment, and here we concentrated on the Jesus Prayer . Repetitious prayer in the rhythm of our breathing – breath in the name Jesus, breathe out 'sinners'. We are human, Jesus was human and understands us; we have our limitations.

When we make the sign of the Cross it is a priestly act and we are making the connection between God and us.

'Silence is God's first language.

Fr Charles celebrated Mass on Saturday and also Benediction on Saturday evening, which was followed by Compline.. Mass on Sunday was celebrated by Canon Wendy, and the Revd Pat Willson from St Gregory the Great, Horfield, was Deacon. It was good to have these two women at the altar for the Mass and breathed fresh air into our life at All Saints as we look forward to our future together with our Vicar Designate, Fr Kim Taplin.

Life on Retreat is not all sitting around listening to addresses. Each address lasted about 15-20 minutes and the rest of the time was relaxation. The gardens of Abbey House are beautiful and well-cared for and we had access to the Abbey grounds. Some of us walked in the grounds, while others relaxed with a good book or papers in the Library. The food was excellent, probably the best we have had in years .This year we had four 'new' people among us and it was so good to have them. It would wonderful if more people joined us next year.

We all arrive on retreat tired and with different baggage and at different stages of our spiritual life, but we gel as a group and go away refreshed and ready to take God within us out into the World again.

Next year's Retreat will 6,7,8 February 2015 at Abbey House, Glastonbury.

*Liz Badman, Parish Reader (LLM)*

## From the Bishop

Sitting in a cafe a few days ago with my daughter, Naomi we found ourselves sitting next to a man who was clearly on his own and very likely my sort of age. After a bit of banter about the fact that he supported the Arsenal, I asked him how his life was. His response was to ask me how long I had got!

He then went on to tell me that basically his life had always been unhappy. His father died when he was young and his elder brother joined the Merchant Navy as soon as he was able. When he came home on leave, his brother drank heavily and would regularly physically attack him and their mother. At the age of 16 he ran away from home and as far as I could tell had never seen either his mother or his brother ever again.

Our conversation took a turn when he asked me, "Are you religious or something?" I told him that I wasn't religious, but I was a Christian believer. "What's the difference?" He asked. I told him that religion was about ticking boxes and trying hard, but that Christianity was about a God of grace who loves us even when we don't deserve it and who sent His Son into the world to live amongst us, to die upon a Cross in order that we might be reconciled to God and reconciled to one another. "Never really thought about that before" he responded.

The very same day I was chatting to my cab driver. We talked about this and that and he then told me that he lived abroad. I asked him where he lived. I expected him to say France or Spain. "Estonia" he told me, "the women out there are amazing." Fearing what he might go on to tell me, I was vaguely relieved when he told me about his girlfriend.

After one or two comments that I confess made me feel slightly uncomfortable, he told me that his girlfriend was much younger than he was. I asked him if he saw a future in the relationship. "No mate," he told me, "I'll enjoy it while I can." I asked him if he thought that was what relationships were meant to be like? "Dunno mate" he replied, "but I know I can't keep mine going."

I write this in the light of the fact that we, as a Diocese, want you, at the right time and when the opportunity arises, to say something about your faith. Before you tell me that it's easier if you wear a clerical collar, you need to know that on both occasions I wasn't wearing one. Our audacious goal is that by this time next year 10,000 of you might, in some way and in some context have told something of your story.

*You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth Acts 1:8*

Everybody has a story. Some are tragic, some are less so. What I have written above I have written because I think it makes clear that people want to tell their stories, oftentimes to a stranger. In listening intently to the stories of others we create a platform to say something of our own story and in doing that, we fulfill our calling to be witnesses.

So let's give it a go!

+Mike