

## **June 2015, thoughts from Father Charles:**

### **The Gifts of the Spirit**

There are nine days between Ascension Day and the Day of Pentecost. Traditionally this period has been a time of fasting and prayer for the Church in honour of the disciples' time of prayer, unity and reflection before the Giving of the Spirit.

For us, at All Saints this year, it was a little different. It was during this time that Fr Kim and Chrissa moved on in response to God's calling. And, though it was a sad time for us as they have become close to us in leadership, pastoral care and guidance, it is also, for them, an exciting time. It will mark the start of a fresh opportunity for Fr Kim to bring his considerable gifts into his chosen sphere of ministry – education – something that has huge impact on the developing minds and future practice of young people. We can assure them of our prayers and thoughts as they settle into Malvern and bring their gifts to this new ministry.

### **What are the Gifts of the Spirit?**

At Pentecost we listened to the account given in the second chapter of Acts. We read that the followers of Christ, the Twelve Apostles (including the replacement of Judas, Matthias), the Mother of Jesus and various other women and brothers were gathered in one place. It was on that place that the Spirit descended 'with the sound of a mighty rushing wind' and upon each of them appeared 'tongues, like as of fire'.

As a consequence of the giving of the Spirit, we read in Acts about the ability for each person to hear and understand one another, and we listen to the accounts of the Disciples stepping out teaching and baptising with power and authority. These gifts resonate strongly with the 'Seven Gifts' described in the Book of Isaiah which were to be the characteristics of the awaited Messiah. These included 'Wisdom', 'Understanding', 'Right Judgement', and 'Courage' – characteristics well demonstrated at this time by the Followers of Christ as they emerged from a period of 'retreat' to one of 'mission'.

Within the New Testament we also find other descriptions of the Gifts of the Spirit, especially in the Epistles of Paul. Here we see lists of expected characteristics, including those of Apostle, Prophet, Teacher, Pastor and Healer. Yet we also find other descriptions of Gifts, including Administration, Whoever Speaks, Those who Help, Leadership, Intercession and Mercy.

### **The Benefits of the Gifts!**

As a Parish, we now enter another period of vacancy and, though we hope and pray it will be short, it will again demand our collective and collaborative effort. And this means the good use of our gifts for the life and growth of the people of God, who make the church here, and also for our impact on the community and those with whom we work and live.

This includes us all. Those who participate in the life of the church – as choir members, servers, members of the daily office team, administrators, preachers and officiants. Those who speak to baptismal families and other visitors, enabling them to feel welcome and at home. Those who contribute the worshipful feeling and organization of the church through prayers and intercessions, through the beauty of flowers and financial giving, and through leadership and bringing good order to all that we do.

*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6*

In many ways it was meaningful and instructive that the first Sunday of our vacancy was the Day of Pentecost. A day when we look around and give thanks for the richness of the gifts apparent at All Saints and we ask for guidance in their use, for the benefit of the church and our growth during this next period of our life.

With Every Blessing



### **Fr Kim's final sermon at All Saints**

A fiery, revivalist preacher prowled the pulpit of his chapel, haranguing people into the Kingdom of God. One Sunday, he was preaching on a text from Romans 3, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* He looked up and glanced around his petrified congregation.

‘Put your hand up if any of you think you’re perfect,’ he challenged.

Not a fidget or a twitch. And just as the satisfied minister was about to move on to his next point, a single hand went up at the back. The preacher glared disapprovingly at the man and asked, ‘So you think you’re perfect, eh?’

‘Oh no, not me,’ replied the man, ‘I’m putting my hand up on behalf of my wife’s first husband.’

The other day, I stood in the church porch for a while and studied the list of past incumbents of All Saints. It begins, of course, with the great Richard William Randall, vicar from 1868-1892. Then there are a variety of very interesting sounding priests. My favourite is Fabian Menteth Elliot Jackson. Not because I know anything about him, but that name is certainly formidable! Many served for considerable periods. Randall himself for twenty-four years. The record holder is Maurice Paget Gillson who was vicar for 28 years. I tried to imagine their stories, their styles, their joys and their challenges. There would be many similarities to today, of course – after all, human nature doesn’t change; pastoral needs are always a constant. But in other ways, contemporary vicaring is a world apart; as different as a quill is from a computer.

When the sign writer returns, my name will be put up there. 2014-2015 KIM TAPLIN. Generations to come may try to imagine my story. Kim.....that sounds like girl’s name. Perhaps she was the first female vicar of All Saints? And why only a year? What’s that about? A good question.

We still don't fully understand God's thinking about what's happened during this last year. Was my appointment to All Saints a mistake? Were our spiritual discernment compasses faulty? Chryssa and I have agonised over these questions and, despite the seeming contradictions and paradoxes, we still believe that our time at All Saints was meant to be. How do we make sense of this? How do we all come to terms with such an early departure? Who knows, perhaps, further down history's time-line there will be greater clarity for us all. It's certainly true that often the Christian life is lived forwards and understood backwards. I'm helped by remembering Corrie ten Boom's tapestry.

On 28<sup>th</sup> February 1944, Corrie ten Boom and her family were arrested at their home in Haarlem, the Netherlands. They had been hiding Jews from the Nazis. The Ten Booms were transported to Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany, where Corrie's sister died. Why did God allow this to happen? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Later in her life, Corrie ten Boom demonstrated her understanding of her experiences using a piece of purple cloth, which she kept in a large purse. She would unfold the cloth to reveal hundreds of seemingly-random, knotted strings. The tangled mess on the underside of the tapestry was in stark contrast to the beautiful image on the upper side – a crown of gold with multi-coloured jewels. "We only see the underside," she would say, "Whilst, from above, God sees a masterpiece!"

She passionately believed that, one day, our vision would become clear, and that we would be able to perceive our lives from God's perspective. We would understand that it is only because of the difficult times in our lives that we can appreciate the good. She would recite:

*Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly*

*Will God unroll the canvas, and explain the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skilful hand*

*As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.*

Humanity, as created in the image of God, is called to *work with God* in crafting the beauty and the ambiguity of our divinely-ordained destiny. German language poet and novelist, Rainer Maria Rilke, observed that, "Destiny itself is like a wonderful wide tapestry in which every thread is guided by an unspeakably tender hand, placed beside another thread, and held and carried by a hundred others." Our calling as Christians is simply to try to weave well.

Priestly ministry anywhere is essentially a ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation *vertically* between humankind and God; *horizontally* between people; and *inwardly* as a quest for spiritual wholeness and integration.

A priest is called to enable people to make connections with God, and to make the Christian Faith authentic and relevant. For Christianity consigned to the history books, and even the aesthetic appreciation of inspiring buildings and fine liturgy is like a beautifully-dressed corpse. The heart must always beat anew in each generation.

A priest is also called to build bridges between people. Not to autocratically order people across the construction, or to drag them kicking and screaming to the other side. After all, in the end, each of us has to make our own journey to God. No, the priestly vocation is to walk alongside with an arm around the shoulder.

Third, a priest is called to make a journey into the interior of his or her own soul. To seek that perfect love which just might cast out all fear. To wrestle with faith and doubt. To cling on to the idea that there is indeed hope in the face of a cold, dark universe.

But this ministry of reconciliation is not just the property of the clergy. Oh no.... it's what we are all called to as disciples. For is not *mission* another name for the task of seeking reconciliation with God? Is not *community* another name for reconciliation between people? And is not *spirituality* another name for that inner journey of discovery?

I know that I'm more convinced about God and his love than I've ever been. But the older I get, the more questions I have for him. And he doesn't mind about that, I know. However, there've been many more moments of huge privilege and blessing which few jobs can match. I've been taken into the precious confidence of parishioners. I've been alongside people during the most significant times of their lives, good and bad. I've shared in the daring and risky adventure of living. There has been so much laughter and fun along the way. Chryssa and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Before writing this sermon, I looked back at the very first Vicar's letter I produced shortly after being licensed at All Saints. It made interesting reading. I referred to St Paul's image of the Church as being the Body of Christ in which unity is celebrated and diversity is encouraged. I wrote, "*We are a pilgrim people, loving and learning from each other; always thankful for what we have gained on our journey, but still peering into the distance with wide-eyed excitement about where God may lead.*" This seems just as apt today.

In *Four Quartets* (Little Gidding V), T.S. Eliot wrote:

*What we call the beginning is often the end*

*And to make an end is to make a beginning.*

*The end is where we start from.*

Viewed from a different perspective, endings are new beginnings. Every time we complete a task, or a job, or an academic year we are free to make a fresh start. Every time one Vicar moves on, we look forward to see who the next shepherd will be. We should strive to let go of any past pain, find forgiveness for our failings and move on to embrace exciting new challenges.

Thank God that, this time, the vacancy should be brief. We shall continue to pray with you that God will lay his hand on the right person to lead this very special Church into the next chapter of its remarkable story. There will always be a part of All Saints in our hearts. We shall never forget you.....and Malvern is only one hour up the M5!

In the last chapter of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ declares: *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.* (Revelation 22.13) In Christ, we

can have confidence that our past, present and future, and all our *endings* and *beginnings* are secure in his love.

Let me finish with a celebrated declaration by Dag Hammarskjold, the Swedish diplomat and UN Secretary-General from 1953-61. In these few words, he captures the essence of what I have been trying to say about gratitude and about hope.

*For all that has been – thanks.*

*For all that shall be – yes.*

## **Vera Price**

I am very privileged to have been asked to say a few words about Vera.

Vera was born in Bedminster, Bristol, on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1904, and at the time of her death she was the 10<sup>th</sup> oldest person in Great Britain.

Vera was the eldest of four children. She had two brothers, Royston and Norman, and a sister, Phyllis.

Vera attributed her longevity not so much to her genetic inheritance, although her mother did live to be over a 100, but to the positive outlook on life and the inspiration she had received from her parents.

She said her parents were true Victorians, possessing many of the best ideals and virtues of that period which they passed on to their children by their own example.

The family environment was that of good manners and Christian morality. They enjoyed the outdoors, communed with nature and loved their fellow man. The children were never smacked. If they misbehaved their father would talk to them quietly and gently, but firmly, point out the error of their ways.

Talking to the children, at their own level of understanding, from such an early age encouraged all of them to think for themselves and stimulated their curiosity.

Vera's brothers never lost that curiosity and fascination with the mysteries of nature and science.

Royston had a passion for astronomy, foreign languages and woodworking. He spoke out about the immorality of war and, later in life, took Holy Orders in the Anglican Church.

Brother Norman's passion was mathematics, algebra in particular, and he studied the spiritual and mystical teachings of Rudolf Steiner.

Vera herself could hold her own in any learned discussion on religion, politics or world affairs. Some of her opinions on Christian doctrine would certainly have raised the eyebrows of many an orthodox churchman – but Vera always returned to the familiar Christian teaching of her childhood.

Vera kept us enthralled with her memories as a young girl during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War ; of the ‘flu epidemic; of her singing to wounded soldiers outside the General Hospital; of long food queues; and the sound of the church bells and factory hooters when the armistice was declared.

Vera’s lifelong career was in the Civil Service – most of the time at the Foreign Office in London.

During the 1939 – 45 war she was a cipher officer decoding messages coming in from all over the world. She worked long hours, often throughout the night while the London blitz raged outside. On a number of occasions she met the Foreign Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, in the corridor. He would gracefully hold the door open for her to pass while they exchanged a few words of greeting.

Vera was later posted overseas to Rabat in Morocco; to Tehran in Iran – where she remembered celebrating Victory in Europe Day at a special reception at the British Embassy. She also worked in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia.

It was while she was home on holiday from Belgrade that Vera made one of those decisions that only a deep thinking and independently minded person would ever dream of making – to give up all the glamour, privilege and prestige of a Foreign Office appointment and go back to drab old London to work for the newly constituted National Assistance Board handing out grants to the poorest of the community – work which Vera felt, at the time, was more spiritually rewarding.

She was with the National Assistance Board for some 9 years before moving to the Treasury for the last few years of her Civil Service career.

Vera retired from the Civil Service in 1965 and returned to the family home in Bristol to help her sister, Phyllis, look after their mother. This was the time when Vera took to the open road! thoroughly enjoying her newly acquired skill of driving a motor car. It was also during these early years after her retirement that Vera, with her sister, visited old friends in America, Canada and Europe as well as in London.

After their mother’s death in 1978 the sisters moved out of the old house and Vera went to live with friends in Bognor Regis. However she was back again in Bristol in the 1980’s, acquiring one of Brunelcare’s apartments in Bishopston.

Earlier, in 1968, Vera’s brother Norman had married a fellow anthroposophist, Molly Gouldsworthy and Molly Gouldsworthy’s own nephews and nieces immediately adopted Vera as their beloved and highly respected ‘Great Aunt’.

Among Vera’s new nephews and nieces, was Carole Jenkins, who, by good fortune, lived near Vera and was a nurse well skilled in the ‘care of the elderly’. And it has been Carole

who has kept a loving and close watch over Vera's welfare ever since - and who arranged Vera's funeral today.

Vera was for a time at Brunelcare's Worcester Court in Clifton before moving some 7 years ago to the West of England Society of Friends residential home at Avenue House, Cotham,

Right to the end, Vera was one of their most able residents; still able to wash and dress without help and to organise her daily activities which included reading the daily newspaper to keep in touch with current affairs. She always had a jigsaw on the go and was very happy to entertain the occasional visitor with an afternoon cup of tea at 4 o'clock and a chat, and often ended the day playing patience.

Vera did occasionally become very tired and it was then she would say, she had had a good life and wished now that the good Lord would call for her in her sleep – quoting from the Bible 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace'.

Her wish was granted. She died peacefully in her sleep on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May, having become a TV celebrity the previous evening, when she appeared, as one of the eye witnesses interviewed, in the current BBC documentary 'Britain's Greatest Generation'.

Vera was an outstanding example of that truly remarkable generation.

An inspiration to us all ! We shall never forget her!

ABJ  
24.5.15

**Address given at the funeral Vera Price 1904 – 2015 on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2015 by Jessica Smith**

Words from the gospel reading today: *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* (John 11:25-26)

I think, in Vera's case, we might be tempted to take Jesus's words at face value, as it sometimes seemed she might stay here for ever! For many of us she must surely count as our oldest friend or family member. And what a friend! A woman of countless talents, in which friendship ranks near the top. More of that in a moment. I didn't come to know her well until after her 100th birthday, but that still provided over a decade's worth of unalloyed enjoyment in company of this remarkable woman.

Over four sessions with her soon after she scored her century, I took notes as she recounted her extraordinary life and these have helped in reflecting on the rare gift she has been to humanity, the many lives she has touched in her exceedingly long one. Indeed, she probably

saw life through a much longer lens than most of us. Her mother, after all, born in the 1870s, was raised by three great aunts born before Queen Victoria came to the throne!

It's clear that Faith permeated her life from the outset. It gave her that quiet assurance and spiritedness which eschewed the expectations of others and relied totally upon God's grace and guidance. During those reminiscences 10 years ago Vera quoted three particular passages from the Old Testament which informed her prayers and actions throughout her life.

One was from the Prophet Isaiah (40:31) "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.*" Vera's strength must have been at a low ebb many times. Living through two world wars, she knew about deprivation, suffering and danger. She was tragically widowed young, two years before the outbreak of WW2. She had her fair share of ill health, and times of doubt. She said she'd had what she called "blank" times when she abandoned God, but came to realise that he never abandoned her. That's Faith in a nutshell, if you think about it. Private prayer seemed to come naturally to her. She said latterly that she could just say or think 'God' and the communication would flow between them. The old prayer 'God be in my head' we heard sung just now would have resonated deeply with her. That doesn't mean she always got the answers she wanted. She prayed the Nunc Dimittis prayer of Simeon incessantly in her last years, wondering why God kept her here when she longed to go to her rest. She'd say it before going to sleep, "and then," she laughed, "I wake up and want my breakfast!" Vera liked to tell of a vision she'd had of departed family members looking towards her, smiling. She couldn't make out whether they were saying "Come and join us" or "Stick it out, old girl". "Well, now I know!" she concluded, with rueful humour. The Nunc Dimittis is usually said at funerals, but because it was so important to Vera, today it will be sung by Meg, Ruth and Hazel in the Geoffrey Burgon setting (made famous as the credit music for the 1979 TV dramatisation of John le Carré's novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy.*)

Another favourite verse she quoted was from the Book of Proverbs (3:6) "*In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths.*" No doubt this was behind her indomitable spirit of adventure, of wide horizons. It gave her that 'can-do' mindset and energy which enabled her, in spite of leaving school at the age of 14, to have a distinguished and varied career all over the world. It inspired in her the spirit of service to return to the old country after the war and spend her working life among its poorest. It kept her driving her car till only the expense of insurance in her late nineties prevented her. She took some seemingly foolhardy risks because she believed implicitly that the Lord would send his angels to protect her. And protect her they did; she saw them!

And the third verse she recalled, from Isaiah again, (45:11) was "*Command me concerning the works of my hands.*" She recalled this when she was stressed out and couldn't think what to do for the best. 'Tell me what to do and I'll do it.' It seems to have worked well for her when there were big decisions to be made in life and career.

Well, Vera, the Lord granted your dearest wish in his own time, with the most peaceful passing. Those of us here today in this church, where you worshipped the Lord you love and who loves you in eternity, can never be thankful enough for all that you were in this life. You had a magnetism and charisma, as well as wit, intellect and wisdom, and I don't think you'd

mind that being said because you know so well know the source of it. I remember a birthday card you received from a member of staff at Avenue House which bore the message "When I've seen you I know my day will only get better". Those who love you miss you beyond what can be expressed, but each of us cherishes indelible memories of fun, laughter, setting the world to rights and fascinating reminiscences of a life well-lived. Truly, dear Vera, you were a light of the world in your generation. When Jesus said those words to Martha "*I am the resurrection ...*" he asked her "*Do you believe this?*" You undoubtedly do, Vera, so with confidence we commend you to the loving God who made you and in whose house you shall dwell for ever.

### **Have you met a saint?**

Just before Pentecost I was in Edinburgh, at a conference on Hagiography as Literature. 'Hagiography' means writing the life of a saint, with special reference to the lives which were written in the early centuries AD, but there are reasons why it has come to mean 'uncritical admiration'. Many of these early lives of saints tell stories which are very hard to believe, about martyrs who survive many attempts at execution, or about ascetics who survive on impossibly low amounts of food and water and sleep. Some of the stories do not seem to deserve admiration. Take the holy man who withdrew to solitude in the desert of Egypt, and refused to see a woman who had travelled from Rome to ask for his help. 'At least remember me in your prayers!' she begged, and the holy man replied 'I pray to God to remove all memory of you from my heart.'

We can make a case for him. He feared that she was the first in a long line of tour groups, and in his time monks were warned not to think about women. ('First you think of your mother,' said John Cassian, 'then you think of other women, then you think of the woman you ought to visit now with spiritual counsel ...') In the early lives of saints, their prayers are powerful because of their intense and undistracted commitment to God. Sometimes they can help the powerless who suffer physical and mental illness, drought and famine, aggression and injustice. In *Silence and Honey Cakes* (2003), Rowan Williams shows how the 'Desert Fathers' (and even a few Mothers) can still be a source of inspiration.

But there are other kinds of saints, who confront oppression like Oscar Romero, or who live below the radar doing what they can for the people they know. In the letters of Saint Paul, 'the saints' are the members of the local church, 'holy' because they belong to God, but very far from saintly. I was staying with friends who are pillars of their church, so I asked whether they knew any saints. They immediately thought of one, and soon agreed on two more. The first, with his family, works in dangerous parts of the world; the other two live in Edinburgh. The common feature was simple goodness, without concern for self, but there was something else, which was hard to put into words: people around them were somehow aware of the presence of God.

Have you met a saint? How could you tell?

*Gillian Clark*

## Thoughts about the Holocaust

Fr Kim's sermon on 25<sup>th</sup> January stayed with me for some time afterwards and these are a few thoughts based on my reflections on it. If you have forgotten it, it is available as *The Yellow star and the Cross*, All Saints Occasional Paper Jan 2015.

One of the questions which Fr Kim raises is: "How did the Jews cope? What did their suffering do to their faith? This prompted me to go back to the writings of a young Dutch woman, Etty Hillesum. She was born in 1914 to Jewish parents. Her family was probably not an observant household, however it was full of cultural interests and activities. Etty herself received a university education. Her life during the 1930's was, as she herself acknowledged, chaotic. However, she determined to change and her introduction to Julius Spier, a German psychoanalyst in 1941 was a turning point for her.

It was probably Spier who suggested to her that she should keep a journal to help her and she did this from 1941-1942. This provides a deep insight into the development of her spiritual life. Together with her letters to friends which have survived, it has been translated into English. Her writings reveal a quest for spiritual integration amidst all that was happening around her. In July 1942, she began work for the Jewish Council first as a typist then at her request she transferred to the department for "Social Welfare for People in Transit" at Westerbork, near Amsterdam. This was a holding camp for Jews who were transferred from there to Auschwitz. On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1943 she herself was transferred with her family to Auschwitz and died there. Her body has never been found.

I have been greatly enriched by her writings and it is impossible to do more than give a couple of examples here to whet your appetite and suggest that if you are interested, you might like to follow up this by reading one of the books I've added at the end.

"My red and yellow roses are now fully open. While I sat there, working in that hell, they quietly went on blooming. Many say 'How can you still think of flowers?' Last night, walking that long way home through the rain with the blister on my foot, I still made a short detour to seek out a flower stall and went home with a large bunch of roses. And there they are. They are just as real as all the misery I witness each day. There is room for many things in my life, so much room, oh God" July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1942.

Part of the significance of what she writes is that Jews were by then forbidden to use public transport or cycles, so that they had to walk everywhere. It is part of her refusal to hate that she still wants flowers.

"To sum up, this is what I really want to say: Nazi barbarism evokes the same kind of barbarism in ourselves ...We have to reject that barbarism within us, we must not fan the hatred within us, because if we do, the world will not be able to pull itself one inch further out of the mire." Woodhead, p57.

On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> January Fr Charles reminded those of us at mass that it was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thomas Merton's birth. I remembered that in his book *On Peace* he writes

about the Holocaust. He has two pieces, one about Auschwitz and the other about Adolf Eichmann. He wrote them in response trials of war criminals including that of Adolf Eichmann and he writes: "one of the disturbing facts to come out in the Eichmann trial was that a psychiatrist examined him and pronounced him *perfectly* sane. I do not doubt it at all, and that is precisely why I find it disturbing."

Finally I was asked to lead Stations of the Cross on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday in Lent and when I went to get out my notebook which contains them, I found this prayer which I think will sum up something of what I have been learning thanks this little journey I have been taking.

Oh Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill-will. But do not remember all the sufferings they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering - our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to judgement, let all the fruit which we have borne be their forgiveness.

Prayer left by a dead child by an unknown prisoner in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp.

### **Books**

*Etty: The letters and diaries of ETTY HILLESUM 1941 – 1943.* Complete and unabridged, Klaas A. D. Smelik (ed.) Arnold J. Pomerans (translator). Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002

However there are shorter ways to her writings

Woodhouse, Patrick. *Etty Hillesum: a life transformed.* Continuum, 2009

Hillesum, ETTY. *Essential writings.* Selected with an introduction by Annemarie Kidder. Continuum, 2009

Merton, Thomas. *On peace.* Mowbray, 1976

*Jean Bradford*

### **IN THIS MONTH ... JUNE 1922**

The Training Ship "Formidable", by Revd R M Gibbons

Have you ever met a "Formidable" boy? If not, you have missed a rare treat and you should repair without delay to the Nautical School at Portishead and make his acquaintance. Many people have the idea that he is to be avoided by reason of his propensity (as they imagine) for appropriating other people's property, his rough speech and his total absence of manners. Hence they conceive in their minds the alternative title for the School, viz the Naughty Boys' School.

On the contrary he is the most delightful and lovable person in the world: if you can win his respect, his whole-hearted affection will follow and there is nothing he will not do for you, and no one could wish for a better 'pal'. He speaks in a queer tongue strongly reminiscent of London, and his ideas on the subject of manners are crude, but nevertheless very engaging. If he should - and it is not unlikely - relieve you, unknown to yourself, of your cigarette case with its contents, he is probably at the same time saving up his hard-earned pennies to buy you a little keepsake. There is not an ounce of vice in him: there is a wonderful amount of good and magnificent qualities though! After four and a half years I have failed to discover a bad boy: they are all diamonds, rough possibly, yet nevertheless diamonds.

His early history is tragic and full of pathos. Sometimes he is sent by a Board of Guardians (half the ship's company is in this category) in which case he is a Volunteer with no stain on his character, but simply unaware of what is meant by Home and Parents. Sometimes he comes because he shows a persistent tendency to run away from his Day School - a little habit incidentally not unknown in other strands of Society - here again he has nothing against him. Sometimes (only a quarter or so of the complement are like this) he has been obliged to live by his wits - and who that has visited a big city slum shall dare to judge him? In this case he feels conscious of being 'up agin it' until his first interview with the Captain Superintendent who informs him that all past things are wiped out and he starts with a clean conduct card, and wearing the most honoured uniform in the world - that of the Royal Navy. This surprises and delights him and to his eternal credit be it said, he rarely ever disgraces that uniform or betrays the trust reposed in him.

In spiritual things he is without exception the most responsive and reverent-minded being in the world and happy is the man who has the privilege of ministering to him in holy things. If tackled in the right way his enthusiasm and devotion are amazing, and a visit to the School Chapel would provide a never-to-be-forgotten experience to anyone who cared to make the experiment. He loves particularly the Sacrament of the Altar and he will teach a lesson in reverence to very many of the grown-ups who pride themselves on their regular church going!

His notions on religious things when he arrives as a New Entry are crude and sometimes entirely absent, as for instance when a lad solemnly informed me that King Solomon was 'the bloke who was walking aht wiv the Queen of Sheba', but he has a singularly keen insight into human nature hasn't he?

I could say lots more but must desist.

I wonder if the people of All Saints' Clifton will say a prayer for these splendid lads, and perhaps go and make friends with them. I am ever so proud and happy to number them amongst my real friends and would not exchange the friendship for that of all the aristocrats in Europe.

## **Green Squares and Secret Gardens**

Several private gardens and squares including our own at All Saints will be open for this CHIS (Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society) event on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> June. Music will be played on both days, with a free concert on Saturday **at 4.00 pm when John Bacon** (tenor) and **Helen Mills** (piano) will perform Schumann's great song-cycle 'Dichterliebe', and on Sunday when John Davenport will play a selection on the newly-restored organ during the afternoon. Teas will be available on both days, though will not be served whilst the Saturday concert is in progress i.e, 4-5 pm.

If you are able to help on either day, or provide a cake, please sign the list in the porch.

All proceeds will go to the organ fund.

Details of the event are available at <http://www.cliftonhotwells.org.uk/greensquare.html>

## **Bishop's Letter**

### **From infinity to beyond!**

*As the Church calendar moves to the season known as 'ordinary time', Bishop Lee invites us to make it an opportunity for awe and wonder rather than the mundane.*

As a boy I was fascinated with space travel. Perhaps it was growing up during the so-called 'space-race' when the USSR competed with the USA to send a human into space or land a man on the moon. Although the Soviets won the initial stage with the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin they were soon eclipsed by the Americans, 12 of whom stepped onto the lunar surface.

My reading material reflected this fascination as I went through a series of library books with such gripping titles as *Mission to Mercury*, *Voyage to Venus* and *Journey to Jupiter*. At around that time, it must have been in the second half of junior school, I was introduced to the concept of infinity. The universe itself was presented as infinite and I can remember lying in bed thinking about the vastness of space and finding myself feeling afraid, pulling the bed covers over me as if that would make a difference!

Scientists do not now regard our universe as infinite, though the notion of 'multiverses' – the theory there may be an infinite number of other possible universes - keeps the thought alive. Yet even if our universe may have bounds, its immensity is truly overwhelming and intimidating. In *God in the Lab*, Dr Ruth Bancewicz endeavours to help readers get a sense of its scale by describing the earth as a peppercorn sitting 26 paces away from a melon, which is the sun. Mars is a pinhead situated a further 14 paces away with Jupiter represented as a chestnut 95 paces from Mars. Pluto is a grain of sand almost a kilometre from the sun, while the cloud of space-dust which marks the limit of our solar system is 3200 miles away. The nearest star, Proxima Centauri, is another 3,200 miles beyond. According to this scale, if the sun were a melon in London, the next closest star would be in Chicago. Isn't this jaw dropping?

The illustration comes in a chapter entitled 'Awe' and this probably best describes what I experienced as a boy and still feel now, though more maturely. When the astronomer Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell was asked how she keeps such huge scales in her head she said that she didn't – she used mathematical shorthand. It was impossible to sustain that sense of magnitude in the day to day routine.

Given that God the Holy Trinity is, as one prayer puts it, 'the source and foundation of time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness', awe ought to be a natural and expected dimension of Christian life and worship. That is the testimony of the scriptures where awe, astonishment, being reduced to silence, and falling to the ground accompany encounters with the living God. A question every Christian might ask themselves is this, "When did I last experience a sense of awe – of reverent fear – because I caught a glimpse of the transcendent majesty of God?" Though these moments are a gift, and cannot be conjured or manipulated, each of us can make opportunities for them to happen, while those who lead worship can either assist or hinder such encounters.

In her book *Everyday God*, Dr Paula Gooder explores how ordinary life can be tinged with awe, wonder and the extraordinary for followers of Christ. It does, however, involve choosing. Jesus used to tell parables as a means of helping them to wrestle with and engage with the choices they were being invited to make.

In that spirit I am going to leave you with 'The Bright Field', a piece by R S Thomas, which Dr Gooder placed at the beginning of her exploration. I invite you to spend some time with it, perhaps over several days, asking the Holy Spirit to make it a place of encounter with God.

+Lee

### The Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through  
to illuminate a small field  
for a while, and gone my way  
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl  
of great price, the one field that had  
treasure in it. I realise now  
that I must give all that I have  
to possess it. Life is not hurrying  
onto a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning  
aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

*R S Thomas*

**THE BRISTOL CATHOLIC SOCIETIES**

(THE CATHOLIC SOCIETIES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND)

from: The Turnpike

83 West Town Road  
Backwell  
Bristol BS48 3BH  
15th May 2015  
Dear Friend in Christ,

**THE BRISTOL CATHOLIC SOCIETIES ASSUMPTIONTIDE FESTIVAL  
SATURDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2015**

The Right Reverend Martyn Jarrett SSC, formerly Bishop of Beverley, will preside and preach at this year's Festival on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Solemn Mass, preceded by a Procession of Our Lady, will be concelebrated in Bristol Cathedral, by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter, at noon. At 3.00pm Vespers of Our Lady and Solemn Benediction will be sung in the Lord Mayor's Chapel, College Green, at which Bishop Jarrett will preside.

The choir will again be that of St Mary's and St John's, Bathwick, directed by Anna Warhurst; music will be by Darke, Britten, Farrant, Rossini and others.

The Festival is organised on behalf of the Bristol Catholic Societies by the Church Union and the Guild of Servants of the Sanctuary, who will be celebrating their annual corporate Mass. The Festival has the support of these and other Catholic Societies, in particular the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and the Additional Curates Society.

Priests wishing to concelebrate are asked to advise Chris Verity (see below) beforehand if possible. This will ensure sufficient chasubles and stoles being available.

Those unfamiliar with Bristol should follow the signs to Bristol City Centre; both the Cathedral and the Lord Mayor's Chapel are situated on College Green, which adjoins the City Centre. There are ample car parking facilities. The Cathedral Coffee Shop will be open, as will restaurants, cafés and pubs in the area. College Green and the secluded Cathedral garden are ideal for picnics. City and Country bus services stop on College Green or Anchor Road, and there is a frequent bus service from Bristol (Temple Meads) railway station to College Green.

This Festival is a wonderful opportunity for Anglo-Catholics to celebrate the Glorious Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and, through her, to worship Almighty God, in the manner that they would wish. Please make every effort to join us, and persuade friends and colleagues to do so. Further information may be obtained from the writer.

Yours in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

*Chris Verity*

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07982-644139

*The Catholic Societies of the Church of England  
BRISTOL CATHOLIC SOCIETIES*



**ASSUMPTIONTIDE FESTIVAL**

*Saturday 15 August 2015*

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*12.00 noon*

*Bristol Cathedral*

*by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter*

**PROCESSION OF OUR LADY**

**&**

**SOLEMN CONCELEBRATED MASS**

*President & Preacher: The Rt Rev'd Martyn Jarrett SSC*

+

*3.00pm*

*The Lord Mayor's Chapel,*

*College Green*

**VESPERS OF OUR LADY**

**& BENEDICTION**

*For further details ring 01275-462927  
[christopher.verity@virginmedia.com](mailto:christopher.verity@virginmedia.com)*