

## Vicar's Letter – March 2015

Dear Friends,

March brings us the first signs of Spring; lighter evenings, slightly warmer weather and the tentative emergence of buds. However, in the Christian Church, we still have a long road to travel before we can celebrate the narrative of New Life. Passiontide begins on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March, and one week later we celebrate Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week.

I wonder what the scene would have been like on Palm Sunday, just after Jesus of Nazareth had entered Jerusalem on a colt. I offer this poetic suggestion:

*The crowds have dispersed; the air is still.  
A trail of trodden palms and  
A few forgotten cloaks lie scattered in the dust  
- the debris of a party after the guests have gone.  
And on a distant hillside,  
Lambs are led to Passover and  
Soldiers are working with wood.*

As a young boy, I could never understand why Jesus consciously walked into a life-threatening, religious trap in Jerusalem. Why didn't he run away? He could have gone back up north, to Galilee. He could have set up shop in a sleepy, anonymous hill village, run a profitable carpenter's business, got married, had children and settled down. In a few months, it would all have blown over anyway. Today's news; tomorrow's Galilean chip-paper. He could have enjoyed a pleasant old age, telling his grandchildren about the time when he was nearly famous!

However, Jesus' road to the Cross appeared to be mapped out. It seemed to be one of those 'meant to be' moments of history. But he also made it crystal clear that, if we wish to be his disciples, we must also accompany him on his journey – *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* (St Mark 8.34)

The Cross is the universal symbol for Christianity, replacing the symbol of the fish which was used more commonly in the early church. We are so familiar with the Cross, and even in our contemporary, postmodern secular society the symbol is still widely worn as jewellery or displayed in tattoo form on the backs and arms of professional footballers! In such contexts, we can easily forget that crucifixion was one of the most gruesome forms of torture and capital punishment devised by humankind.

St Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* (1 Corinthians 1.18) In the first century Judaeo-Greco-Roman world, the notion that God redeemed humankind by means of a crucified saviour would have appeared foolish beyond words; it was a direct contradiction of accepted ideas of status and power. However, God often subverts conventional notions of wisdom, authority and value, and he deliberately chose to do this by the startling paradox of a crucified man exalted as Lord Almighty.

Passiontide and Holy Week remind us that God is for us, especially when we face trauma, anxiety and feelings of loss or being lost. Christians do not believe in a God who is untouched by our pain and suffering. He is not a dispassionate spectator watching the bloody contest from the safety of the stand.

In Christ, God himself could be said to have suffered and died, and he continues to suffer in the anguish of his children. There is a sense in which his is the blood that flows from our open wounds. His are the organs choked by cancer. His is the mind imprisoned by depression. His are the veins scorched by narcotics. His is the heart decimated by loss.

Ultimately, the darkness and the brokenness of the Cross is the only authentic response which the Christian faith can offer for the darkness and brokenness of our world. It is through the power of the Cross, that suffering may be transformed into salvation and wholeness. Such is the scandal and the foolishness, but also the mystery and the majesty of the Christian doctrine of redemptive suffering.

Passiontide and Holy Week are hugely important at All Saints Church. There will be many opportunities for young and older to gather together to wait with or walk alongside our Lord as he makes his way towards the *Via Dolorosa*. Please see the details of all of our services on the Church noticeboards or in our Easter card.

With every blessing for a reflective and meaningful Passiontide.

*Fr Kim Taplin*

#### **THANK YOU**

To everyone for the wonderful flowers and cheque given to me on 22 February to mark my retirement from 9 years as Parish Administrator. It is so generous.

I hadn't realized I had been Parish Administrator for so long, it passed by in a flash! It has been fun on the whole and I have enjoyed meeting visitors to the parish and also visits from members of the congregation. I will be doing more now as a Lay Minister.

I intend to buy a painting with the cheque, that will hang in my large study and then I can remember everyone.

*Liz Badman*

## OFFA'S DYKE CHURCH CRAWL

We are repeating this popular Church Crawl on **9 May 2015**

The plan is to call at Llanthilio Pertholey for coffee and a tour of this beautiful border church, a trip up the tower is on offer for the more energetic amongst us.

We will then drive on to Llanthony Abbey and have a picnic lunch in the Abbey grounds and look at the tiny church dedicated to St David.

On up to the Gospel Pass calling at St Mary's, Capel-y-Ffin, a tiny gem of an 18<sup>th</sup> century chapel. Then down to St Mary's Hay-on-Wye where we will have a tour of the church and then go on to the vicarage for tea with Fr Richard Williams, who led our Retreat this year.

We hope to be able to get hold of a mini-bus.

More details as I work out the timings etc. But please note this in your diaries. These Crawls are always great fun.

*Liz Badman*

## LENT at All Saints

*An opportunity to grow in faith and discipleship as we prepare for Easter*

**TUESDAYS: 7pm Mass** 24 Feb-24 Mar

### ***"In the Wilderness"***

A series of reflective homilies exploring the temptations of Jesus and what it means to experience the wilderness in today's world

**FRIDAYS: 7pm Stations of the Cross**

A series of guided meditations focusing on the passion of Our Lord

## CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS

8 & 29 March after 9.30 family service

**MOTHERING SUNDAY - 15 March**  
**10.30am we all come together for Family Mass**  
*followed by parish lunch (tickets on sale from 22 Feb)*

## FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

Wednesday 25 March

9.30am Mass 7.30pm Festival Mass

***Lent Charities – Food Bank & Uganda***

## ALL SAINTS PARISH RETREAT 2015

This year our Parish Retreat was led by Fr Richard Williams, vicar of St Mary's, Hay-on-Wye. Fr Richard led a retreat for us about 5 years ago and was a firm favourite to invite again. He is, in Fr Kim's words, 'inspirational'.

The theme of the Retreat was on our relationship with God and God's relationship with us and was based on the brilliant children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

As usual we met at Abbey House, Glastonbury, where the atmosphere and the welcome is better and warmer every year. The food was excellent and plenty of it. Our retreats are held in silence, which is very important to us. However, if there are any who cannot cope with just under two days silence they can speak quietly outside in the garden or their rooms. The corridors and public rooms are silent, and this should be respected. Silence starts after supper on Friday and finishes just before lunch on Sunday. As the retreat progresses the silence deepens.

We gather together to say the Morning and Evening Offices and to say Compline. We also celebrate Mass each day.

Fr Richard started our first session by reading a poem he had written called *The Travellers*. He went on to say that we are all pretty messy, we are broken people and said how an artist can turn a broken object into a beautiful mosaic. This is what God does with us and our mosaic reflects God's good light. God is Love, God is broken on the Cross; Love has an essential element of sacrifice. Our brokenness is the fingerprints of Heaven and God does wonderful things with our brokenness. Sadly we lose who we are by other people's expectations. At the Fraction the bread is broken – opened up, so to be a blessing to the world we must bless our own brokenness.

There is an Orthodox Tradition that says that God will kneel down before us and look into our faces, then we in time will look up and see ourselves reflected in him. So God, who sees us now in our brokenness loves us, so we should love ourselves just a little bit more.

On Saturday morning for our second address we referred to Psalm 139 – Know oneself. The Velveteen Rabbit became Real when he was loved, so when we are Real shabbiness doesn't matter. We fail to see ourselves in the true image of God. The angels nudge us to do things we wouldn't normally do. Many of us have a diminished self-image from childhood and it takes the whole of our adulthood to get over childhood. We must get over our bad self-image by Love. Back to the Orthodox Tradition where we see our true image reflected in the eyes of God.

Saturday afternoon was free time and we all did different things, some of us went for walks, one or two visited hippie pagan shops on the high street, some slept or read books. After tea, at 4.30pm we met again for another short address where we thought about how Beauty turns the world upside down. In our spiritual life we make mistakes in comprehending Reality. Reality is beyond appearances. When Dom Gregory Dix was dying he said that 'God is so devious'. The divine deviousness of God breaks through our thickness and our security. God is the God of surprises and he has ways of surprising us. – little fingerprints of God are miracles which are really quite ordinary = God is extremely consistent.

In the address after supper on Saturday we heard how we become Real through suffering – we become completely Real when we stand before God. We are loved although we have shadows i.e. health, breaking down of relationships etc. God doesn't take them away. It is most revolutionary to believe in God, A pebble on the sea shore is precious because it is. God is God, he is not part of his creation or our creation.

The final address was on Sunday morning where Fr Richard talked about miracles and said that:

Regularity is important, Mass and Offices should be said dead on time.

They happen with each breath we breathe, they start at our conception and end up in eternity.

They are at our feet, not at a distance.

Our part of the bargain is to apprehend miracles.

We should sit in a chair and imagine Christ sitting opposite

Prayer is being made aware that God is present.

We should make friends with invisible and the visible disappears.

So like the Velveteen Rabbit we should enter into the Reality of Now, the Reality of ourselves, the Reality of God.

We can become part of the miracle as God makes things beautiful.

After lunch we took our coffee into the Library and thanked Fr Richard for a wonderful retreat and presented him with a book token.

I spoke to Fr Richard a few days later and he said how much he enjoyed being with us and said that the Retreat did him good and he sends his love and blessing to all he met.

It would be really good if more people would consider coming on Retreat next year, it seems to be the same people every year, we would welcome the freshness of new people with us. The silence is not threatening and there is loads of free time to do whatever you want. Next year's Retreat will be 19-21 February and our retreat conductor will be the Rt Revd Rowan Williams.

Liz Badman *Lay Minister*

## **IN THIS MONTH.....MARCH 1894**

### **REVERENCE**

It might have been thought that to write upon such a topic as the above to the people of All Saints' was unnecessary, for Reverence is one of the Christian attributes which we strive especially to attain, and we had hoped, as a congregation, with some success. Our confidence has received a rude shock. From three absolutely distinct quarters, all of them entitled to the highest respect, and each correspondent writing in ignorance that another had written, we have this month received communications which it is impossible to pass over in silence. The allegation is that the "scrambling and pushing" which takes place among communicants at the early Celebrations on Sundays, and even on Week-days, is in direct violation of St Paul's command that all things should be done "decently and in order". One letter, in particular, from a member of the C.B.S., who has special opportunities for observation, is extremely severe; and the Editors have perused it with painful feelings. We have, however, our duty to perform, and we must do it. The confusion which arises is caused by constant collisions, and in our church there is no excuse for it. In many churches there is no entrance to the Chancel save through the gates: the communicants then stand in single file on either side, and those who have received pass in an orderly manner down the centre. With us this arrangement is unnecessary, because we have two additional outlets, one through the Lady Chapel, the other through the Organ Chamber. As, however, the other is on the north side, and leads directly to the Women's seats, it is that exit that should be chiefly used, for, of course, as the women communicants are, to their honour, far in excess of the men, it is to them we are here alluding. But what happens to those who strive to obey this obvious and elementary principle of order? They are met by a stream of communicants advancing through the Organ Chamber to the Altar, and the inevitable consequence is collision and confusion. We trust we have only to mention this painful matter, and the better judgement of the congregation will shew them the right way.

We think also, and it is also our correspondents' view, that the exterior of the church after the services on Sunday does not present that spectacle of calm which should befit the conclusion of a solemn Service in the House of God, but too often that of boys released from school, or the breaking up of an audience from some place of amusement. Instead of passing away quietly to their homes, people linger on the asphalt path in groups, noisily greeting their friends, and often blockading the foot-way and driving others into the muddy road. This is hardly an ideal state of things. We must

remember that we have set up for ourselves a high standard at All Saints': and if we fall from it, our fall is so much the greater.

# ALL SAINTS CLIFTON



## T.S. ELIOT's FOUR QUARTETS

*Meditations on Time and Eternity*

**A complete read-through with 20 voices**

**SUNDAY 15th MARCH,  
6 o'clock in the Sacristy at All Saints Clifton**

*All welcome*

*If you'd like to stay afterwards for a simple Lent  
supper, RSVP by 8<sup>th</sup> March to Jessica and Ken Smith:  
9249203; [tandysmith@talktalk.net](mailto:tandysmith@talktalk.net)*