

## **June 2017, Referendum, Recreation and Division, from Father Charles:**

### **Referendum**

I know that many of us were shocked by the Referendum result and by the poor spirit in which the discussion was conducted. At the outset I must say I regret both the result and the manner of the Referendum. Prior to the vote the evidence informed us that the outcome would be a close run thing – but somehow there was a general expectancy that the balance would be tipped in favour of ‘Remain’.

My intention here is not to explore the reasons for any of this, though at some time there should be time for reflection and learning.

It is ‘looking to the future’ that is my concern here. As Christians we hold to the Gospel values of truthfulness, inclusion and respect; and after the impassioned debate, we should pray for reconciliation amongst the divided parties and groupings that have divided our nations, communities and even families.

What is needed now is a period of calm and reflection whilst the structure and order of things is reframed. Additionally, we should pray for the United Kingdom, our partners in Europe and in the rest of the world as we pass through a time of uncertainty, remembering that many of the promises made on each side will not be delivered. Our need is to find ways to step forward, without recrimination, and together build a just and peaceful future in which all people can flourish.

### **Recreation**

On a brighter note, as we leave ‘flaming’ June, we enter the traditional season of holiday during July and August. Most of us will be looking forward to the opportunity to have a short break away from the daily routine. For our young people the summer holidays provide an important opportunity to recover and rest from a year of school and university, with exams and all the other demands of our educational system. For the rest of us the opportunity is to spend time within families, investing time in ourselves to restore and re-create ourselves.

Holidays are really important; they provide that chance to step away from the everyday, to reconnect with those we love, to relax and be ourselves. They also provide us with a bank of good memories and experiences on which to reflect.

Whilst we look forward to all the things we have planned, let’s not forget that there are many families in the UK that cannot afford a holiday. It’s estimated that nearly one and a half million British families can’t even afford a single day out together. This works out as about five million people who simply don’t get a day out. No memories for them, no summer-days-out to talk about when they get back to school.

### **Divisions**

The referendum and the thoughts about who can afford a holiday and who can't, have caused me to reflect upon how divided we are as a nation. In the Referendum differences revealed themselves between old and young, London and (mostly) the rest, England and Scotland, elite and working class. Interestingly, an insight to 'holidaying' was also provided by the Referendum. Leavers tend to holiday in the UK, whilst Remainers tend to holiday abroad.

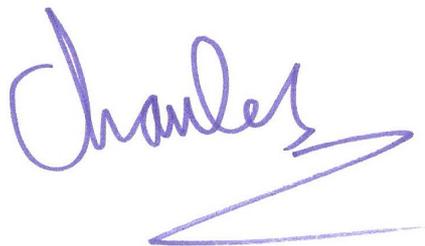
I suppose that in all this, far from creating clarity or unity, the Referendum has caused us to shine a light on the divisions that exist in the country. People who are divided by geography, social class, age, education and income seem to be very divided by their outlook on society and our place in Europe.

Where do we as the Church sit in all this? The Archbishops have released a statement that is printed elsewhere in this magazine and many of our Diocesan Bishops have also released statements. However, I will finish by offering part of the statement provided by Bishop Christopher Hill, President of the Conference of European Churches, who said:

*"I hope the churches – including our partners in the Catholic Church – will be able to revitalize a vision for Europe much broader than the mere economic, a vision informed by a Christian understanding of society which looks to the common good of all, supporting human rights and inclusive communities without collapsing into purely individualistic demands, and understands (from the inside of faith) the need for dialogue between faiths and all people of good will."*

How does this translate into what we do and say here at All Saints? Whilst our overall reach is local, rather than national, and our influence is focused within Bristol, we do have a responsibility to translate these ideas into what we say and do here. This applies to all of us, not only when we meet in church, but importantly when we go about our daily lives, working and living within the various contexts that make up our lives.

With blessings and prayers,



## **Weekday Mass**

### **All Saints, Clifton in the Diocesan Prayer Cycle**

Wednesday 27 July is the day on which we at All Saints will be remembered in prayer within the Diocesan Prayer Cycle, and at the Cathedral during Daily Office and the 1230 Mass.

It would be great if we could have a small group of us to attend (if you're able to do so) the Cathedral Mass on Wednesday 27 July at 1230. Also, for those who can linger, we could have a bite at the Cathedral Café, followed by a short tour.

### **Monday Mass**

For most of the existence of All Saints as well as morning and evening prayer being said each and every day, there has been a daily Mass. During the vacancies this was omitted on Monday and Thursday each week, though the Thursday Mass was reintroduced in September following the appointment of Fr Charles.

Starting in August the Monday Mass will also be reintroduced; this will take place at 0930 on Monday mornings. This means the weekday Mass times from August onwards will be:

Monday	0930
Tuesday	1900
Wednesday	0930
Thursday	1900
Friday	1030
Saturday	1030

## **The EU Referendum**

Whilst we thought the discussions about the Referendum might be over by now this is far from the case. However, there are three 'church responses':

- The Archbishops Statement that we have been requested to publicise
- Statement from the Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, who speaks much good sense
- EU Referendum Litany – the prayerful response we have been asked to use and muse on

### **Statement from the Archbishops on EU Referendum Result**

**24 June 2016**

On Thursday, 23 June, millions of people from across the United Kingdom voted in the Referendum, and a majority expressed a desire that Britain's future is to be outside the European Union

The outcome of this referendum has been determined by the people of this country. It is now the responsibility of the Government, with the support of Parliament, to take full account of the outcome of the referendum, and, in the light of this, decide upon the next steps. This morning, the Prime Minister David Cameron has offered a framework for when this process might formally begin.

The vote to withdraw from the European Union means that now we must all reimagine both what it means to be the United Kingdom in an interdependent world and what values and virtues should shape and guide our relationships with others.

As citizens of the United Kingdom, whatever our views during the referendum campaign, we must now unite in a common task to build a generous and forward looking country, contributing to human flourishing around the world. We must remain hospitable and compassionate, builders of bridges and not barriers. Many of those living among us and alongside us as neighbours, friends and work colleagues come from overseas and some will feel a deep sense of insecurity. We must respond by offering reassurance, by cherishing our wonderfully diverse society, and by affirming the unique contribution of each and every one.

The referendum campaign has been vigorous and at times has caused hurt to those on one side or the other. We must therefore act with humility and courage - being true to the principles that make the very best of our nation. Unity, hope and generosity will enable us to overcome the period of transition that will now happen, and to emerge confident and successful. The opportunities and challenges that face us as a nation and as global citizens are too significant for us to settle for less.

As those who hope and trust in the living God, let us pray for all our leaders, especially for Prime Minister David Cameron in his remaining months in office. We also pray for leaders across Europe, and around the world, as they face this dramatic change. Let us pray especially that we may go forward to build a good United Kingdom that, though relating to the rest of Europe in a new way will play its part amongst the nations in the pursuit of the common good throughout the world.

**Bishop Nick Baines, Bishop of Leeds an extract from his 'Blog'**  
**25 June 2016**

So, the people of the UK have spoken. But, what they have said is unclear. Nevertheless, the outcome is more than clear. We must now shape the future and not simply waste our time complaining about it.

What is powerfully clear also is that we now have a rudderless government trying to forge a path it doesn't believe in towards a destiny it cannot – despite the rhetoric – control. We will need to watch carefully the consequences of our collective decision, recognising that not all consequences will be intended, convenient or controllable. There are dangers as the whole of Europe faces a radical reshaping, with some of the most powerfully motivated people having the most dubious and dangerous motivations. Fragmentation is possible. No doubt, in the days, weeks and months ahead, there will be plenty of “what if?” moments. But, those who voted to remain in the EU cannot simply sit sniping from the sidelines, suggesting that all consequences were predictable and that those who voted to leave the EU must take sole responsibility for what now follows. We are all responsible for taking responsibility and shaping what we want to become. Those of us who believed we should remain in the EU must not become victims.

Reconciliation is a word that is easy to speak and hard to bring about. It cannot be enforced and it cannot be regarded as cheap and easy. Today we have a bitterly divided country, with fear and resentment bubbling on the surface and feeding on the uncertainty. The churches can provide space for those on both sides of the divide to recover the humanity of the public discourse, to recognise and articulate a common vision for the common good, to incarnate the sort of solidarity we cannot yet imagine.

And we can pray: pray that, in the words of Paul to the Christians in Rome, all of us might be transformed by the renewing of our mind in order that we might together discern the good and perfect will of God for ourselves and his world.

The work begins now. We have no idea where it will lead.

But, then, we are no strangers to faith.

### **A Litany of Reconciliation**

***Churches may wish to use this litany in services on Sunday, or it may be used in individual or small group prayer.***

Holy God, in whom we live and move and have our being,  
we make our prayer to you, saying,  
Hear us, Lord of life.  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Guide our nation in the days and months ahead  
to walk the paths of peace and reconciliation.  
Hear us, Lord of life.  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Give to our leaders wisdom and sensitivity  
to work for unity and the common good.  
Hear us, Lord of life.  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Mend broken relationships  
and restore to wholeness whatever has been damaged by heated debate.  
Hear us, Lord of life.  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Sustain and support the anxious and fearful  
and lift up all who are dejected.  
Hear us, Lord of life.  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

With you, Lord, is the well of life  
**and in your light do we see light.**

Hear us, Lord of life and peace:  
**and make us whole.**

With you, Lord, is the well of life  
**and in your light do we see light.**

Hear us, Lord of life:  
**Heal us and make us whole.**

*A period for silent reflection and prayer*

Lord our God,  
accept the prayers of your people  
and in your mercy look with compassion upon our nation,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Herefordshire church crawl**

On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May a heterogeneous group of eleven clambered into a minibus ready for a gentle progression around three Herefordshire and one Monmouthshire churches. 09.15 seemed a little early for some to be abroad on a Saturday morning,

First stop was in the Severn Bridge toll queue which took a surprisingly long time to disperse. That dealt with, the drive up *via* Abergavenny was beautiful, with may blossom in the hedges and all the trees at their absolute spring best. There were good views of the Sugarloaf and of Skirrid Fawr ahead and the Blorenge behind us. Any would have made a good walk had we not been expected at Dore Abbey at 10.45.

There was a welcome party for us at the lych gate where we enjoyed a fully comprehensive tour by A Lady of the Parish. She set the historical scene for the establishment of this Cistercian community from France in 1147. She took us through the days of prosperity, built on the wool trade, through the dissolution in 1536 and on to the restoration by John Viscount Scudamore in 1630. The 1630 Laudian design survives almost in its entirety, although the altar table of the period has been moved and the vast monastic altar stone that had been removed at the dissolution for use as a meat salting table at the farm next door had been replaced on new pillars. The endurance and survival of this altar stone through indignity, and a gravestone in the floor by the north door, commemorating three child siblings who died within six weeks of the summer of 1831, were particularly moving.

Our next stop was St Margaret's church, some 8 km to the north west, accessed down ever-narrowing lanes which, had the hedges not been so neatly trimmed, would have been too narrow for our vehicle. The church, dating to the Norman period, built and roofed with the local red sandstone and with a boarded bell turret is tiny and isolated, standing on the ridge between the Golden Valley to the East and the Black Mountains to the west. Despite its isolation and lack of a surrounding village it was well cared for, just as well as it contains a stunning early 16<sup>th</sup> century oak rood loft, held up on rather insubstantial-looking but ornately carved pillars. All was undamaged, showed no sign of insect boring or wear, as fresh as the day it was installed, though further delving reveals that it was deconstructed, restored and reconstructed in the 1930s. We picnicked in the churchyard, admiring the views and wondering how there came to be so many chest tombs and ornate 18C gravestones in such a remote area. The wool trade again, perhaps.

We drove down off the ridge, across the Golden Valley and on to Kilpeck, that tiny Norman church in red sandstone, hard against the castle mound, site of some of the most stunning carvings in the country. Whilst the sandstone of the external walls was weathered, that of the carvings on the corbels was not. Was that down to informed use of a better-cemented stone or to their protected positions under a corbel table itself protected by the roof? Probably the former, as the degree of weathering of the carvings does not vary with orientation to prevailing wind and weather source. This amazing church is visited so much and is so close to the Newport-Chester line and the noise of the Abergavenny-Hereford Road that, although very special, for me it lacked some of the atmosphere of St Margaret's.

Having worked up a bit of an appetite for tea we made for the final stop of the day, Grosmont and St Nicholas' church which rather counter intuitively was east of our other English stops yet in Wales.. Here we were met by the vicar, Jean Prosser, who showed us around. The nave is vast and empty and used as a community space, for markets, archery practice and other community events. Dendrochronology has dated the nave roof timbers to 1232-1244, making it the oldest roof in Wales. The church was close to dereliction by C19 when the current worship area was created by J.P

Seddon in the 1870s, in the crossing and chancel. This is a lighter and brighter bit of the building, yet the 1870 roof timbers have had to be replaced long before the 13C ones of the nave.

By now getting rather peckish, we repaired to the Angel Inn for what might best be described as a heavy tea. The woman publican, of antipodean origin to judge by her accent, had baked us scones, Welsh cakes, bara brith and ginger cake. In true All Saints fashion, short work was made of it, but most uncharacteristically, nobody availed themselves of the bar.

It was a beautiful day. The churches were all stunning, fascinating and survivors variously of reformation, near dereliction and the wear and tear of centuries. Thank you Liz for masterminding, and David Flemington, a friend from Christ Church City for driving the van so fearlessly and well down those tiny lanes.

*MB*

### **All Saints, An Ordinand's Perspective.**

For the month of June, I have been on placement at All Saints Clifton as part of my training as an ordinand. I choose to come to All Saints because I felt that it was a good opportunity to learn more about the Catholic tradition within the Church of England.

During the five Sundays that I have been at All Saints I have, given a presentation at the family service, preached the 8 and 11 'o' clock service and also served as an acolyte. Serving was very special for me as it gave me the opportunity to become more involved with the act of worship, and gave me a greater understanding of the Eucharist.

The placement was not just about Sundays, during the week I have been shadowing Father Charles. I have found that outside of the usual services, there are lots of other duties and meetings to attend to, this has ranged from home Eucharist and visits to various people in the parish, to meeting with people to discuss Baptisms or weddings. We have attended the local primary school for their summer fete and I also joined Jessica Smith to do some reading with children in another school. Given out food parcels at the Sisters of the Church, got together with the clergy from the deanery for their chapter meeting, and helped with the Church clean up day.

There have also been lots of events happening, with property auctions, organ recitals, concerts and the 'Let's talk about Europe' evening.

I have really enjoyed my time at All Saints and my understanding of the Catholic tradition has grown immensely.

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your kind hospitality, I will be keeping you all in my prayers.

God Bless,

Tim Bell.

## **IN THIS MONTH ... JULY 1977**

The Vicar, Revd J C Norton, writes on the 10th anniversary of the re-built church.

My dear Friends,

I first set eyes on the re-built All Saints on March 28, 1968, the day when I came down to Bristol to have a look at this job the Bishop of Bristol had written about. I never saw the original church, but I used to come up to the "little church", particularly for my confession, when I was a Curate at St Mary Redcliffe, from 1952 to 57.

As I am not a very diligent reader of the *Church Times* I did not even realise that the church had been re-built. So you can imagine my surprise - and delight - when Canon Luetchford drove me down Pembroke Road from the south and I saw the splendid angles of Robert Potter's church unfolding (or building up) in front of me. It must have taken great courage and imagination for the Vicar and PCC to have adopted this design - but how right they were!

In fact, on that March 28 I had little idea that this might be a possible job for me. I had come down from the north because it seemed only polite to do so. The splendid new church played little part in my decision-making, at least until it was explained to me that it was proving to have a real drawing power in itself (not true of many buildings, I think) and that it would be the focus point for a considerable re-think about how the Catholic religion could be presented in the Church of England. I was also assured that the drift of families away from Clifton had been halted, even reversed.

I have put in this bit of autobiography because it has something to do with our celebrations on July 2 when we offer Thanksgiving for the first ten years of the new building. For me, thanksgiving will centre round the extent to which the new All Saints has been able to encourage people to witness to the Risen Christ in our world. Without the witness the building would be a white elephant.

It is difficult for us humans to be happy and jubilant without also seeming to be complacent. I know that the many people who have been responsible for planning our open day would all wish it to be thought of as being entirely "open-ended". We have taken the odd step, here and there, in working out what it means to be a Catholic Christian in these late-twentieth century years. We have a long way to go in finding out how to share, lovingly, humbly, but confidently, what we are discovering for ourselves.

We love our church. We know it exists for many others besides ourselves.

JOHN NORTON

### **A letter to the Apostle Peter from a 21<sup>st</sup> century disciple**

**Sermon preached on the feast of SS Peter & Paul on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016, the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fr Charles Sutton's anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.**

You have the highest profile of any of your brother Apostles in the gospels, heavenly friend, and on your feast day today we've heard from Matthew and Luke recording two of the many defining moments in your life, but let's look at others recorded by those two in particular.

After pondering your journey with the Master from its outset, one imagines you as Simon bar Jonah, with your brother Andrew, as successful Galilean fishermen. Had you both been listening to John the Baptist and then heard Jesus taking up his cousin's proclamation "*Repent, for the kingdom has come near*" (Matt 4:17)? Maybe your rapid response to Jesus's call was because you'd already been drawn to this wandering Rabbi - and he knew it. Whether it was a sudden impulse or the result of longer deliberation, you clearly were willing to quit the thriving family business for a life of uncertainty. I suppose if you didn't already know the second pair of fishermen brothers, James and John, then you would anyway have had plenty in common. It seems, according to Matthew, that the four of you were the first and the other eight joined a bit later. You heard all that teaching we know as the Sermon on the Mount, and that Kingdom revelation will have contributed to your gradual understanding of Jesus's identity, leading to your declaration: '*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God*'. But there was another defining moment before that, wasn't there, that daybreak sea storm when the Lord commanded you to walk to meet him on the water. You faltered, but the Lord stretched out his hand to save you. Matthew writes that as the wind died away you and your boating companions worshiped him as '*the Son of God*.' (Matt 14:33). You were truly getting it, but when you declared him as Messiah, Son of the Living God, he wasn't congratulating you for being clever, but for having a particular receptivity to the Spirit of God. (Maybe it was that very receptivity and openness which at other times got you into trouble. There's not one of us could judge you for that!)

And so you were re-named Peter, the rock, echoing that last parable you heard in the Sermon on the Mount, where the house founded on the rock did not fall, even though in your case you would continue to stumble ... Not literally, though, for you were sure-footed enough to be one of the chosen three for the mountain trek to see Christ transfigured. How human of you to think the summit could be a dwelling place of light, but you had to go back down. There was much more to learn from the Master's earthly ministry, including unlimited forgiveness, by which you would not only be bound as a follower, but also experience profoundly after the resurrection. Your frailty and denial before the crucifixion was cancelled out by the opportunity to declare your love and take up the pastor's staff handed to you by

the Good shepherd himself, and subsequently being commissioned with your fellow Apostles to '*go and make disciples of all the nations*' (Matt 28: 19).

We relate to you strongly as a somewhat conflicted man, nonetheless able to assimilate what you took to heart to produce moments of utter transformative lucidity, such that during and after Pentecost you became the supremely eloquent public orator to the first converts as well as to the bigwigs (whom you were fearless in challenging and from whom you took persecution as an honour) then later on to non-Jews. You were a gifted healer whose shadow alone could cure the sick (Acts 5:15); one who raised up the dead, imitating the Resurrection and the Life himself. Tonight we heard Luke tell of your miraculous release from prison – noting, as we surely ought, that this was after '*the Church prayed fervently to God for [you]*' (Acts 12:5)

After this, we hear rather less about you in Acts and more of Paul, with whom at one time you crossed swords (so to speak). Well, he was quite a different character from you, wasn't he? For one thing, he had much more formal education than you did. It must've been a shock when this driven persecutor of followers of The Way came into the fold. I think we can imagine how you felt ... and then he thinks he knows better than you! Still, your separate ways, as Paul acknowledged, worked for the good.

Now you each number among the holy ones in glory, your differences ended. For all your strengths and weaknesses were so different from one another, we acknowledge, today of all days, that each of your lives was completely drawn into the life of Christ. As Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy '*I am ... being poured out as a libation ...*' (2 Tim 4:6). He was by then spent in witness, and close to death. Both martyred in Rome by the hideous Emperor Nero – hence your sharing this feast day - we recall each of you going where you did not wish to go, remembering also the present day victims of violence, persecution and abuse. We love you both as Christ's founders of his Church, for being the leaders of the leaders, apostles to the apostles, thanking God for choosing you as 'vessels of his grace'.

Which brings me to another we celebrate today, though he's still an apostle of the Church militant here on earth - a priest in the lineage which began with you as the one we now acknowledge as the first Pope. Yes, our own Father Charles clocks up 35 years of priesthood today. You may or may not be pleased to know that he bears a striking physical resemblance to you as revealed in art and iconography – stained glass too. Perhaps that adds a new dimension to the term Apostolic succession! Too many comparisons would be embarrassing, but reflecting on your separate journeys, there are ... resonances. (He likes that word, resonances!). He swapped life as a businessman for a life as our parish priest, a sacrificial act by him and his family, sparing their blushes. You'd be proud of him, in the best possible way, (though it may have taken him a bit longer than it did you to respond to this particular call ...) I don't know at what points in his life he will have reached out to grasp the outheld hand of Christ, or been alongside you in Caesarea Philippi in recognising the supremacy of Christ in his life, but we may be sure he has. He's a climber, you know, in his down time. Maybe he grasped the holy hand on a precipice somewhere in the mountainous Diocese of Carlisle after he was first ordained...

I had hoped he would say reaching the summit of a mountain is the most exhilarating experience, but he thwarted any hopes of being able to draw parallels

between him and Moses, Elijah et al. No, for him the experience of climbing holds different pleasures – camaraderie, fun, overcoming unexpected stumbling blocks such as weather, terrain and annoying companions, and being prepared for them all with the right gear. Not much to mine from scripture there, then, though Morning Prayer does give us ‘*O all ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord; praise him and magnify him for ever.*’ (*Benedicite omnia opera.*) Perhaps we must simply rejoice that, as Christ and you his saints know, ministry, though wonderfully rewarding, is also demanding, so an enjoyable, exhilarating pastime is to be applauded. He knows at least as much as you do about stumbling!

We know him here as a servant and a shepherd, a watchman for signs of God's new creation... one who involves us laity in telling the story of God's love and nurtures us in the faith ... presides at the Lord's table and leads his people in worship, offering with us the spiritual sacrifice of praise and eucharist... Guided by the Spirit, he discerns and fosters the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith. (Those are paraphrased extracts of words spoken by bishops at ordinations in the present age.) We rejoice in Charles's ministry among us and look forward to the time ahead. Like I said, you'd be proud of this successor.

*Jessica Smith*

### **The devil on my shoulder?**

Isaiah 65:1-9, Galatians 3:23-29, Luke 8:26-39

*Sermon preached at Solemn Mass on Trinity 4*

The Revd Emma Pennington, vicar of Cuddesdon and erstwhile Chaplain of Worcester College, tells the tale of a seminar she herself attended as an Oxford undergraduate. Having settled herself into the capacious sofa in the don's study, he commenced in holding forth on the topic of the day: demons in Christian theology.

A man who always spoke colourfully, he conjured up a particularly vivid visual image of the devil, as a small human figure, but with horns, a tail, cloven feet and a trident; charming, but full only of evil intent. Depicted traditionally he went on to say, as sitting on our shoulders, generally '*a sinistra*', to the left side: close to us, a negative influence, effectively 'whispering in our ear' and trying insidiously, relentlessly to lead us astray.

Being a clever young thing, and at that time, knowing almost all there was to know, Emma remonstrated, along with some of her fellow tutees. Surely, this whole mythology of devils and demons was outmoded, fine for Medieval Christians, but an irrelevant anachronism in the context of our current and superior knowledge of psychology, medicine, sociology and so forth....There followed spirited debate around the idea of the 'little devil' on our shoulder; objective achieved....

But what the Revd Dr remembers most clearly, that which most deeply imprinted itself on her memory, are the last words the professor addressed to her on that day, and the means of his delivering them: *'Thank you Miss Pennington for your thoughts and arguments, which we all appreciate. I may of course be in error, in promulgating still, the personal, the proximal devil, but I, as you, speak only from that which I think and believe I know.'* Clearly, he was looking in her direction as he spoke to her, but Emma relates, his gaze was not meeting hers. Instead, he pointedly focussed to the left of her face, and somewhat below her ear lobe; riveted seemingly, to something else of captivating interest, something very real to the Professor, and which could only have been perched on her own left shoulder.....

**Demons and devils.** We met them in our Lucan gospel of today: Jesus arrives in the country of the Gerasenes, across the lake from Galilee and casts the unclean spirits out of the man dreadfully possessed by a legion of demons.

We accept the terminology in the context of a biblical reading and its first century setting: no dissonance. Do we though, as we hear it two millennia later, with our 21st century ears - the only thing we can do -instinctively mirror something of the reactions of those young students in the seminar? Being devil's advocate, let me put it another way - do we too judge that nowadays we're perhaps a bit too sophisticated , cerebral and civilised to have any useful truck with demons?

Perhaps -or maybe not - at the end of this week, with reports of more sexual abuse; and reeling as we are from the news of violent, primitive acts of murder - here in homely Yorkshire, as well as further afield in the US?

In the context of our topic of demons, and these chastening events, some words of Karl Barth came to my mind: *'Demons are only the more magnified if they are placed in a framework of the conflict between a modern and an ancient system.....the demythologisation which will really hurt them as required, cannot consist in (that is stop at) simply questioning their existence.'*

**Demons and devils.** I'm using the words interchangeably by the way in case you're wondering. I think this is legitimate: there are more than 70 instances of the Greek word for demon in the new testament: in the NRSV the majority of these, including the usage of the word in the passage we heard today, are rendered as demon; a good many alternatively as devil. But if we were to go back to the King James Bible, there every presentation is translated simply as devil.

**For Christians, there is one devil, chief among many demons:** all spiritual beings, at enmity with God and desirous of controlling and inhabiting others: you, me, and yes, Gerasene demoniac. So should you discover - indeed if you already know of - another word more meaningful, specific, pertinent to you than 'demon', I invited you to substitute it as we continue.

**Consider now if you will, three of the effects that the demons have had upon the man in today's reading from Luke:**

Firstly, the demons lead him into self-destructive behaviours:

He is living not in a house but in the tombs; others have kept him under guard and bound with chains and shackles but even these restraints were broken & the man driven by the demons into the wild.

Secondly, the man feels trapped by his demons: They control what he does. For first century reader the fact that we are told he 'wore no clothes' is a potent metaphor for his loss of liberty: losing the capacity to wear clothing would have been associated with others robbed of their identity: prisoners, slaves, the demented.

Thirdly, the man is set apart from normal society and family life:

We hear that he is a 'man of the city' but he has been cast out and banished from this existence. His demons isolate him, keep him from the support of others and meaningful relationship.

**These are the generic effects of Demons: they control their victim; lead them into self-destructive behaviour, and separate them from the checks and balances of society.**

When we extrapolate in this way from the specifics of the first century story, perhaps we can start to identify resonances within ourselves: influences, behaviours, obsessions, achievements, beliefs, that are trapping us, damaging us, isolating us from one another and - most importantly - from God's grace: in summary demons that are preventing us from becoming fully the '*21st century children of God*', that he made each one of us to be.

**If so, let's counter that by reminding ourselves too, that the 'legion' of demons in Luke immediately recognized Jesus as God,** and submitted to his power. (*Ironically, no lack of faith among the demons!*). Jesus commands them to leave, and the man is made clean, clothed, restored to his right mind and returned to his city. God can and will rid us of our demons too, if we ask in faith and let him.

Clearly, the majority of us are not possessed in the very obvious and substantially debilitating way that the Gerasene demoniac was.

**The difference however between him and us is not one of kind, rather one of degree: this is the key 'take home' by the way.**

Our daily demons need not be noisy or obviously objectionable: indeed, from my reading around the topic I wonder whether the particularly grey demon of '*acedia*', as described by Thos. Aquinas might be one especially adept at entrapping new victims in our age: acedia or 'lack of care' is a demon associated ultimately with sloth (one of the 7 deadly sins) but characterised by listlessness, a lack of caring; in its clutches commitment to things once held dear, including God, is devalued; hope for the future becomes folly and the day is depressingly overlong: if you know Thomas Merton's 20th century '*Noon-day demon*' he describes a similar parasitic torpor. This demon of '*Acedia*' confounds God's will for us by making us the polar opposite of the 'human being fully alive' that is His Glory.

**So, in true 'book end' fashion, I return now to where I began, and re-iterate, and take on board certainly for myself, the point made by the learned professor at the outset:** there is, I'm quite sure a figurative devil on my shoulder, a 'familiar' at my ear; archaic imagery or not, and constantly trying to turn me from God.

As for each one of you? Well, I couldn't possibly comment, as someone famously once said..... .

Join me though now, each and every one, as we pray in conclusion:

*Almighty and everliving God  
You have dominion over all things:  
suffer us not to be in thrall to our demons,  
but in your omnipotence cast them out,  
and in your grace help us to resist them;  
steadfast in the faith  
and trusting forever and only in you.  
**Amen.***

Revd Jules A. Barnes