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Plus Other Features

Magazine Team

Margaret Rank Ann Wiseman

Tim Thorp Michael Townson

Susan van Ling Cathy Showell

whose views are not necessarily the same as those expressed in the magazine.

The Harvest is Rich but the Labourers are Few

(Luke 10: 1-9)

Fr Naz's report to the Annual Parish Meeting

One of the priority themes of the diocesan vision is evangelisation. My hope is that as a parish - St Joseph Malvern linked with the joint parish of St Joseph Upton and Our Lady and St Alphonsus Blackmore Park - we shall together discern this priority for the livelihood of communities. By virtue of our baptism, we have become apostles entrusted with a mission. The term 'apostle' means '*one who is sent*' but one cannot be sent unless they have been a disciple in the first place. Being a disciple is not just a matter of becoming active members of the church. It is about developing a personal relationship with Our Lord.

All the same, I would like to thank all those who have continued to respond to God's call, rendering a whole range of services in the life of the parish churches. So many are involved in various aspects of the life of the parish in areas such as the catechetical formation in preparation for the reception of the sacraments and the liturgical life of the parishes as well as those who render services in administration, the PAC, stewards, cleaners, flower arrangers and social outreach such as the One World Group, Thursday Group, or ecumenical outreach. Apart from all these, we also have two other groups: one dedicated to the Thursday adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and the other committed to weekly sharing on the Sunday readings. Let our discipleship be the foundation of these services. Moreover, through all these services and groupings we help in building a vibrant community of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

The current song resounding at most church gatherings, be it among the clergy or among faithful in parishes and deaneries, is all about establishing a strategy of how the church will cope with the staggering fall in the number of priests. A clear example is the working together more closely between St Joseph's Malvern and the joint parish of St Joseph's Upton and Our Lady and St Alphonsus in Blackmore Park. We have even gone to an extent where we had to change Mass times to create a situation where one priest can easily cover all weekend Masses in the three communities. It looks like St Joseph Malvern is beginning to struggle as church attendance seems to be decreasing at the Sunday morning Mass on the whole. We all have to find ways to make the new Mass times work. Throughout the diocese and the whole country there is clearly a visible process of clustering of parishes and even the

unfortunate closure of churches, thereby creating mega parishes on account of the dwindling numbers of the clergy.

Do we genuinely care about the falling numbers of priests? If we do, let us not forget the instruction Our Lord left behind: “*Pray to the Lord of harvest to send labourers to his harvest.*” Do we pray to the Lord of the harvest as instructed by the Lord? I know there are people who genuinely pray about vocations as well as people who won’t get bothered because the Lord of harvest know best.

Recently, however, I was at a gathering of priests where for the first time in years there was a revelation about a uniquely high number of enquiries for the priesthood that has taken place this year. I would like to encourage a lot of prayers for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Let us keep at it as the Lord seems to be speaking to the hearts of some young people in the face of the decline of the clergy. Let us not shy away from being pointers to a life of a specific vocation if we see signs in anyone, young or not so young. A lot of vocations spring from a little word that was said to an individual by someone at some early stage.

The call to be a priest or religious is indeed special but so too is the lay vocation. Everyone is called to serve; each in their own way. No one vocation is more important and more special than the other. The point is that we are all called to be workers in the harvest-field: in fact, lay people tend to be better placed to win people for church because of the opportunities afforded them by their workplace and local communities.

For this reason, I see my priestly role as that of encouraging lay people to evangelise and to give teaching and input about the basic Gospel message, because in a very real sense this is what is missing in our evangelisation. The few programmes we have had on the Lord’s Prayer and the Novena to the Holy Spirit are indicators of the direction we should be taking as a church community. As lay Catholics we don’t always see it as our job to proclaim the Gospel, yet it is, even if it may just be an initial proclamation in terms of witness. It is in this that we need to become more familiar and competent with communication.

The Lord’s word in Luke chapter 10 rings true to every time and every generation. “***The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few; pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest.***”

Jesus spoke these words in the context of the primitive rural society in which he lived. We now need to interpret and understand them in terms

of our own age, a scientific and technological age – an age of social media, Facebook, Twitter, texting mobile phones, laptops, iPad, iPhone and so on and so forth.

The world has changed but the need to hear the Gospel remains the same. We all are called to be the mouth pieces of the Gospel.

Fr Naz

PAC Chairman's Report

When we met last June we talked about the reintroduction of aspects of our liturgy that had been suspended during Covid times. We talked about lots of other aspects of parish life too but one thing in particular struck me from that meeting and the subsequent points made by several in the room: we need to be a church that is radical, forward-looking, and based around a core belief in evangelising. Too often we focused on the practical issues around finance, heating, car parks, and so on. Whilst these are important, they are not at the heart of who we are as part of the One True Living Church. This focus on who we are as an evangelising church has played a more prominent role in the life of your PAC over the last year. Fr Naz expands on this theme in his address at the APM.

The recent Lent talks have been a source of joy as they have been led by the laity and well attended in the three locations where they have been held. This is the sort of spiritual evangelisation we need to encourage. Stations of the Cross are led by the laity too and it was good to see a range of groups each taking turns to lead these. Next, we need to take Christ out into the community rather than simply being contained within the church building itself.

Fr Naz took on the role of parish priest for St Joseph's Upton and Our Lady and St Alphonsus Blackmore Park in the last year. The induction Mass saw a full church welcome him into this new enlarged role, taking the reins over from Fr Hugh who is now in active retirement and living in Upton. There is only so much one priest can do to serve his flock. This is why Mass times have changed. Further change is inevitable. We will evaluate the Mass time changes soon and make adjustments where

these are deemed to be in the best interests of both parishes. We can run and fear change or we can embrace it and make positive decisions that will draw others in. I'm inclined to opt for the latter.

All parishes in the Archdiocese are now required to have an active PAC. For quite a lot of parishes this will mean setting one up for the first time. There is also a move to see deaneries working more closely in some areas: finance, health and safety, and so on. How this will look and feel will become clearer in the coming months under the direction of Archbishop Bernard. What is for certain is that there will be a greater role for the laity in each parish. As priest numbers diminish it is right that the laity 'steps up' and takes on more responsibility for the life and mission of each parish, and in line with the Archbishop's vision for the Archdiocese.

The PAC meets once every two months – more often than in the past and as a direct result of scrutiny into how effective we are. This new frequency will remain in place as it has helped Fr Naz with decision making. We are a diverse group in many ways and that is a real strength because it brings different views around the table to allow Fr Naz to hear what the parish as a whole is thinking.

The PAC relies on the generosity of volunteer parishioners. I am indebted to all our PAC members for the time and commitment they have given especially in the last 12 months. All of the PAC members have multiple roles in our parish and the generosity of heart, spirit and time does not go unnoticed. Barabara Wortley and Susan Van Ling are retiring from the PAC this year and I especially thank them for their commitment over these last few years.

We look forward to 2026 when we will celebrate our 150th anniversary. Plans are taking shape for how we will mark this occasion and the voice of the parish will be heard as we whittle down various ideas and begin to make firm plans. A small group has been set up to oversee this whole project.

Looking ahead, later in 2024 we will see the introduction of the new Lectionary – familiar readings will have new texts that have been

worked on for more than a decade and overseen from Rome by Cardinal Arthur Roache. On a practical level this will mean we will need to have a new Book of the Gospels and Ambo set of books. We will no longer use the Mass Books either and we are looking at how best to replace the peoples' texts.

At the same time as we welcome the new Lectionary we will be entering the Holy Year or Jubilee Year. The message for this Holy Year is 'Pilgrims of Hope'. We will enter into this Holy Year in many ways and a programme will be formed that links to the Holy Father's hopes and ambitions for this year.

Parish giving – the weekly offertory plate – and finance more generally is something that we must touch on. The PAC receives finance committee updates but does not duplicate the work of the finance committee. The same can be said for our maintenance committee. We will be working on how best to communicate our financial position and outlook so that any appeal to the parish around regular giving is based on evidence of anticipated running costs and future projections. We are custodians of our parish and we have a duty to both collect and spend money prudently. We are mindful that we need to maintain a safe and pleasant estate and we will always act with care and diligence when it comes to recommendations around finance.

Finally, a word of warning: our parish is declining in number. We must address this collectively and collaboratively. Encourage others to come to Mass or, in some cases, return to Mass. Mass is at the heart of our worship and we need it in our lives. Please do come to Mass yourselves and tell others where you are on a Sunday morning.

Our parish would not run so well if it were not for the considerable time, effort and skills given so freely by a large number of people. As the Chair of the PAC I do see many things that are done by so many to enhance the life of our parish. Both regular volunteers and one-off volunteering is a key part of what makes this parish work well. We are a living church and the people are the real bricks and mortar. On behalf of

the PAC, I thank all those who do so much to enhance the life of our parish – your commitment is enviable, thank you.

Before finishing this report I do want to draw out one example of wonderful generosity. The parish has recently begun a programme of distributing meals to people who need a little help. Working with the school and Cook! (based in the retail park), we are giving ready made meals out on a regular basis to those who will welcome a helping hand. This project – akin to a community kitchen – has only been possible because of the work of Tanja Perera and the PAC thanks her for developing this idea and driving it.

It is my privilege to have been your PAC Chair for the past year and I look forward to continuing to serve our parish community for a little while longer.

Edd Hogan PAC Chairman 2023-24

Financial Statement

The parish's bank balance on 30/05/24 was **£157,280.34**

The parish has **£180,632.98** invested in the Archdiocesan Unit Scheme.

The Finance Committee meets at least four times a year. The members are Fr Naz; Chris Park, Parish Treasurer; Tina Slevin, Gift Aid (+ 100+ Club while Sundrella is on 'maternity leave'); Marie-France Hicks, Card Machines; Sundrella Kirby 100+ Club; Chris Burger and Sam Craig.

The finance figures for the last 12 months are affected by the electricity bills supplied by the archdiocesan bulk buying scheme being 6 months behind due to a change of supplier twice in 12 months.

The financial deficit for 2021 was - £43,942.14

2022 was -£28,925

2023 was - £3,226.73

	06/21-05/22	06/22-05/23	06/23-05/24
INCOME JUN to MAY	£	£	£
Offertories Gift Aid	32985.50	28057.00	29497.49
Offertories Non-Gift Aid	8268.22	10334.59	10712.75
Donations Gift Aid	1000.00	1550.00	1030.00
Gift Aid	8420.95	10328.73	9701.41
Votive Candles	321.69	504.04	613.59
Piety	61.00	222.60	112.25
100+	5230.00	5400.00	6175.00
McKennies Room Hire	800.00	1647.00	1320.00
Bank Interest	1.40	721.89	1533.34
Unit Trust interest	1807.62	3660.50	4323.94
Legacies(Beryl Gaunt,Raymond Bree)	1339.87	0.00	17123.66
Total	60236.25	62426.35	82143.43

		£
Financial Deficits	2021	-43942.14
	2022	-28295.60
	2023	-3226.73

Bank Balance MAY 30th 2024 157,280.34

Unit Trust 180,632.98

The budget for the calendar year 2024 is for a deficit of **£29,380**. This does not include:

Maintenance work in the pipeline for the McEnnis Room, Toilets and Shed which will cost £25,000+

	06/21-05/22	06/22-05/23	06/23-05/24
EXPENDITURE JUN to MAY	£	£	£
Church Liturgical/Pastoral	5554.23	4032.91	6145.32
Parish Retreat	666.02	0.00	0
House Domestic	6338.14	5094.15	4854.40
100+	2662.50	2475.00	2625.00
Donations	85.00	390.00	2010.00
Supply Priests	440.00	1065.60	1105.00
Clergy Allowance/ Nat Ins	5896.00	4484.00	3421.00
Expenses incl. mileage	1496.39	3465.06	2104.70
Clergy other costs	0.00	460.00	1826.91
Clergy Clerical Medical	200.00	200.00	200.00
Parish Levies	15907.22	15915.08	15499.00
Wages	18919.07	13498.15	13449.56
Office -Telephone & Internet	614.86	640.34	809.77
Other Office expenses	1687.99	3038.66	2572.88
Bank Charges	391.88	454.16	510.93
Gas	4339.11	11434.23	8466.39
Church Electricity	666.52	1490.59	677.78
Water	852.50	693.65	878.28
Church Property	8721.27	9568.25	6840.66
House Electricity	950.49	2909.32	1379.04
Council Tax	1470.69	1530.69	1599.74
House Property Maintenance	1192.22	1274.03	809.81
Sound, Cameras & Interactive Screen	15476.78	0.00	73.62
Boiler	2986.20	8467.80	217.40
Total	97515.08	92581.67	78077.19

In 2023 Parishioners donated £15,795.51 to Charities

Chris Park

Michael, George and Martha - Saints and Dragons



On old maps one could read ‘here be dragons’ for uncharted areas. Today, dragons are still with us, whether in video/computer games or in Chinese New Year festivities.

Dragons play a significant role in Christian mythology, going back to the Book of Revelation and beyond. In the Apocalypse the dragon is equated with the serpent in the Garden of Eden and seen as the embodiment of Satan and the powers of darkness and evil, finally to be overcome by the Archangel Michael.

The evil dragon features in many of the world’s mythologies, and the hero who slays the dragon is to be found from Norse to Indian legends.

Let us concentrate here on three Christian legends, featuring the aforementioned Archangel, the mythical Patron Saint of England, and St Martha.

The first two are probably well known as dragon-slayers to the readers of this article, the third possibly less so, so let’s go to her.

Legend has it that after Our Lord’s death, resurrection and ascension, Martha, Mary and Lazarus - possibly accompanied by Mary Magdalene - left Palestine and travelled to Provence, from where they each went their separate ways.

Martha travelled north to Tarascon, a town that was being terrorised by a dragon and the townsfolk implored Martha to free them from the beast.

The townspeople were armed to the teeth and offered Martha all kinds of weapons, but Martha insisted that she would rely solely on God and the power of prayer, which the Town Captain found it difficult to understand:

“God:” cried the Captain. “To which god do you your prayers advance: Mere words are useless in this case without A sword or lance.”

This is a typical example of the (male) principle of ‘an eye for an eye’, which Martha refuses to accept:

'Captain', replied the Saint, 'your argument I must reject.

The force of arms has so far proved, it seems, to no effect.'

The Captain, however, shows himself incapable of thinking outside his box: "What else,' the Captain said, 'in evil's face may then be moved:

Strength must be met by strength.

Through ceaseless time this is long proved.'

The spirit, said the Saint, 'that down from heaven came as the dove at Jordan-side; the symbol and the sign of perfect love.'

And so it turns out. Martha refuses to be intimidated by the dragon and succeeds in taming it by befriending it and granting it forgiveness for its sins, whereupon the beast returns to the depths from which it came, never to be seen again.

The traditional tale of St George and the dragon has the saint vanquishing the dragon by the sign of the Cross assisted by the force of arms, typically a lance and a sword. There are, however, versions which share elements of the legend of St Martha. In one of them, based in 'Silene' in present-day Libya, the dragon demands human sacrifices as tribute, and the lot falls on the king's daughter, who fortunately is saved by St George, who undertakes to kill the beast if the population of Silene convert to Christianity. The story has a happy end (except for the dragon!) when George marries the king's daughter and they relocate to England, where they have English children, including the legendary hero Guy of Warwick.

What all three stories have in common is the role played by God; St Michael defeats the dragon at the head of the heavenly angelic host, St George uses the power of the sign of the Cross and defeats the dragon as a means of evangelisation and St Martha uses prayer and the power of love to tame the dragon.

Martha overcomes the dragon by the power of love and forgiveness, not by treating it as an enemy to be conquered, and it is here of course that the legend of St Martha and the Dragon differs so radically from the more traditional accounts of the monster being overcome by force of arms.

What we find in the legend of St Martha is a lovely illustration of 'love your enemy' and the uselessness of the principle of 'an eye for an eye' - as Mahatma Gandhi reputedly once said, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth means that everybody ends up blind and toothless".

In psychological terms, the Western dragon can be seen as our shadow, the ‘dark side’, the power of evil that resides within us. Traditionally, and particularly in Christian ideology, evil is seen as something to be ‘overcome’. There are two problems here. The first is the question ‘how?’ It cannot be overcome by force of arms or by an act of individual will, in fact it cannot be ‘overcome’ at all. We cannot ‘split off’ our shadow; what we have to do is to acknowledge it and discern what we can learn from it.

Recent years have seen a ‘resurrection’ of the dragon in such widely different cultural phenomena as the song (and later film) *Puff the Magic Dragon* and the widely popular game of *Dungeons and Dragons*, which show that the dragon is still very much alive in the popular imagination, although the contemporary dragons have lost some of the terror of their ancient and medieval counterparts.

Finally it is perhaps worth just casting our gaze eastwards to look at Chinese dragons. For the Chinese, the dragon represents good luck, strength, health and also the male element Yang. The dragon is unique because it is the only mythical creature of all the animals in the Chinese zodiac.

While Western culture features stories of heroes slaying villainous dragons, Chinese culture incorporates dragons in a more positive manner, as being magnanimous and often very knowledgeable. Dragons in Chinese culture are often associated with business prosperity, bountiful harvests, good health, and protection. Unlike their European counterparts, not many Chinese dragons breathe fire, rather they are more often associated with water.

Is it perhaps time for us in the West to rehabilitate the dragon, to no longer cast it into outer darkness and to recognise that no creature is beyond redemption?

Michael Townson



First Holy Communion 2024



Receiving First Holy Communion means we can receive God's presence, Body and Blood. Since we have made our First Holy Communion we are closer to God.

From Emilia, who also drew the picture

The CAFOD **LiveSimply** Award

In January 2024 St Joseph's Catholic Primary School was awarded the CAFOD LiveSimply Award. It is one of only 32 schools in the Diocese to gain the Award and it was the culmination of 18 months hard work by the children, staff, parents and volunteers.

What is the LiveSimply Award?

The LiveSimply Award is open to Catholic schools and colleges in England and Wales to show that we are living simply/sustainably and in solidarity with the world's poorest communities and each other. As the CAFOD website states 'By signing up to LiveSimply, your school will impact our global family, your local community as you reflect the teachings of Jesus, Catholic Social Teaching and Laudate Si (the encyclical from Pope Francis on Care for our Common Home) along your journey...' The award requires evidence of faith inspired actions relating to each of the core principles; living simply (personal transformation), living sustainably (caring for creation) and living in solidarity (caring for the human family).'

The CAFOD website provided some useful resources to help the school plan how to develop the actions, from a global, local and school perspective. More information on the Award is available from www.cafod.org.uk and there is also a video available on YouTube.

What did the school do?

They designed an Action Plan which was submitted to CAFOD outlining what they were going to do under the different headings. Once it was approved by CAFOD the hard work began!



They made pledges and collected evidence of their work along the way to demonstrate how they had made a difference. The different projects related to the core principles and they were helped by staff, parents, volunteers and the Parents, Teachers and Friends Association, PTFA.

The actions they took included fund raising for CAFOD initiatives, e.g. organising a cake sale and a Book and Toy tombola using donations of unwanted books and toys, run by the School Council, linking to pledges to have less, reuse and recycle.

Children from Years 5 and 6 plus some staff walked to the top of the Malvern Hills as part of the CAFOD Big Lent Walk and raised over £700.

During Lent they also thought of pledges they could do. All families were invited to send in their pledges and they were displayed in the school hall on a Pledgehog! The pledges varied from actively choosing ways to care for the environment to spending more time as a family and valuing the gifts we have.

The School choir sang carols outside Morrison's supermarket to raise money for Father Hudson's Care.

Inspired by the Pope's message in Laudate Si and with the help of the Town's Rotary Club, parents and children volunteers, they collected used plastic bottles to make an eco-greenhouse for growing their seeds and vegetables. They made soup from the vegetables to raise money and also sold green tomato chutney to the parish, as some of the tomatoes didn't ripen!

The School Council wrote to the Foreign Secretary expressing their concerns about world hunger and to ask him if there was anything he could do to help fix the problem but unfortunately they didn't get a reply!

An Evening of Light was held to give thanks for God's light that guides us and looking at ways this is celebrated around the world. Their prayer focus was one of hope for the poor and those in need around the world.

They wrote prayers for peace around the world and these were displayed in the church.

The presentation to CAFOD at the end of the Project was done online and the school was delighted to hear a little while later that all the hard work had been worth it and the LiveSimply Award is now on display in the School. Needless to say we are all delighted!

Therese Langford, Head Teacher and Maggie Griffiths, Co-Chair of Governors

Remembering Fr Antony

Fr Antony Hayne, who died earlier this year, was Malvern's parish priest from 1980 to 1990, a period when the parish had two churches, Our Lady and St Edmund's in Great Malvern as well as St Joseph's, and when it was served by the Benedictine monks of Douai Abbey. He was only 35 when he arrived, and brought energy and enthusiasm and a warmth which endeared him to many parishioners, some of whom remember him here.

From early parish secretary days, soon after Father Antony had arrived in our parish in 1980, I recall an occasion when a leader of a local free church called at our door. He came in, would not sit down, but instead stood in the parish office and announced with astonishment that the day had arrived when he could not only bring himself to knock at the door of the home of the local Roman Catholic priest, but actually enter it too. It was clearly quite a moment for him!

Our previous parish priest had begun the invaluable work of establishing firm, local ecumenical relationships and under Father Antony's leadership, they grew and flourished and became the norm we know today, something from earlier days we could not have dreamed of. Thank God!

Pauline Kirton

I was very happy to know and work with Father Antony. I found him an 'enabling' person - he often encouraged me, and others, to do things we might not otherwise have attempted, and all for the good.

Rosemary Thorp

Fr Antony once came to us for Sunday lunch, to be met by a distraught child whose pet budgie had just died. Unfazed, he led a funeral procession to the bottom of the garden where the budgie was buried with due ceremony. I seem to remember that St Francis featured heavily in the impromptu liturgy.

I also remember, not long after we moved here, semi-apologising to our children for the length of the 9.30am Sunday mass, to be told yes, it was indeed very long, but it *seemed* much shorter than what they had been used to – a tribute to Fr Antony's ability to involve everyone in the liturgy.

Margaret Rank

He led the congregation in a round of applause on the first Sunday mass we made after Ceri was born. I think she was about four weeks old. I felt I had deserved one in the delivery room after a marathon labour but I didn't get one so it made me feel good! *Angela Park*

Fr Antony cared about people and gave them his time. He would 'keep an open door' and would often respond to those who were needy.

One of his special gifts was to give encouragement. If someone came to him with an idea he would encourage them just to get on with it. A spiritual man. He was full of trust in the Holy Spirit. *Liz and Chris Burger*

Fr Antony was not only our parish priest but was a friend of our family for many years and was the celebrant at our two eldest sons' weddings, Andrew in Durham and Robert in Banbury.

We knew him very well during his time in Malvern and during happy and sad times in his later life. He was troubled with ill health and this was exacerbated by his problems with the Benedictine Order which played adversely on his mind, eventually leading to his removal from the Order.

In later years he visited a village in India and became extremely friendly with a family over a number of years. That association was extremely beneficial as a member of the family came to England to give him support and help in the latter years of his illness.

A priest we will remember with love and affection. *Betty and John Clark*

My family and I will always remember Fr Antony as a genial priest. He used to enjoy sharing Sunday lunches with many parish families.

He officiated at the marriage of both our daughters at the church of Our Lady and St Edmund, which as a Malvernian I always knew as the Monastery. It is my understanding that the pupils and staff of Malvern College, to whom it was sold, still call it the Monastery.

In fact our daughter, Sarah, was the last person to be married there before it was sold.

The weddings were wonderful and so inclusive of everyone present, young and old. We were very fortunate that the sun shone on both occasions. Pauline Kirton was the registrar .

One thing I remember especially from Sarah's wedding is that her husband-to-be was so overwhelmed with emotion that he could barely say his vows, so Fr Antony came to his rescue and helped him out.

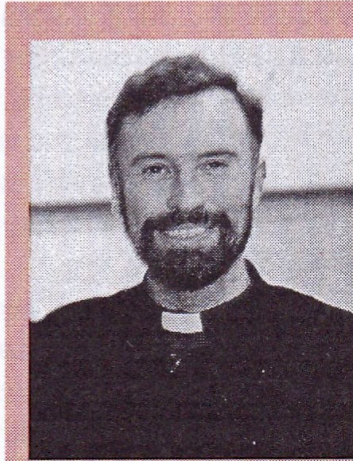
Mary Williams

We arrived in the parish in 1979. A short time afterwards Fr Antony arrived. Although we had already settled in and found the parish so welcoming, Fr Antony brought an enthusiasm and energy that helped to renew people's faith, both young and old. He was an inspiration to so many of us.

Ruth and Des Hopkins

In his turn Fr Antony returned his parishioners' affection, choosing to return to the parish to celebrate his silver jubilee, and recently describing his years in Malvern as the happiest of his life.

May he rest in peace.



Dom Antony Hayne

A Baby Blessing



Last Sunday during Sunday mass we all celebrated the forthcoming birth of the baby of Sundrella and Matt Kirby. Fr Naz will be in Malawi when the baby is born and it was wonderful to see that Sundrella, who has become very active in the parish, and her husband were sent on their way with a blessing.

Then after mass we all gathered to give the happy parents-to-be some wise words of advice and to guess the baby's name and her/his weight, eye colour and many more things. The winner after the birth wins a box of chocolates. A cake was presented by Mary Taylor and we were very well represented.

When Fr Naz returns they hope to show him the new parishioner, baby Kirby who is already so much a part of the parish of St Joseph's. Safe travels Fr Naz and God bless to the happy parents to be.

Susan van Ling

The RCIA - Two Perspectives

What a joy it is to be a catechist and pass on the wonderful faith we have. This year I had the privilege of working with a lovely RCIA group.

The RCIA (**R**ite of **C**hristian **I**nitiation of **A**dults) is a process by which adults discern whether they are called to become members of the Church. Some, such as Peter, are not baptized, so at the Easter vigil he was baptised, confirmed, and made his First Holy Communion. Others, such as Jack and Alice* had been baptised in another Christian church and were received into the Church, confirmed, and made their First Holy Communion.

The RCIA process follows a series of steps and stages. The first is the **Pre-catechumenate** stage, where participants come along and find out about the faith and Jesus Christ and receive some basic teaching. If they feel that they want to commit to finding out more (they are still not committed to receiving the sacraments) we have the first “step,” a short and simple **Rite of Acceptance**, entering into the **Catechumenate stage**, after which the participants are known as *Catechumens*. This is the main time of teaching and for some people it can last for a few years whilst they pray and discern God’s will.

Those who wish to go forward and be received into the Church at Easter, are presented to the bishop at the **Rite of Election** at the cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent. They are now known as *The Elect*, and Lent is for them a period of **Purification and Enlightenment**. (In fact, this is the origin of Lent, as the whole Church spends time contemplating the Christian mysteries along with our *Elect*). Reception of the **Sacraments of Initiation** (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist) is the final step. Our new Catholics are now known as *Neophytes* as they enter the period of **Mystagogia**; which is about deepening their understanding of their new faith and entering more fully into the life of the parish. Our regular Tuesday evening meetings have come to an end, but their journey has not.

Apart from Lent, there is no definite time-scale for this journey and for some people it can take them some years, and others approach us having already decided that this is what they want. There is no pressure to move forward at each stage. In my previous parish we had one participant who came for three or four years before deciding to take the plunge! And then sometimes people decide that it's not for them and we respect that decision too.

If you are not a Catholic and would like to know more about the Catholic faith, with no commitment to "join" please do come the sessions next year. And if you are a Catholic and would like to come along out of interest, feel free to come along too.

And the joy in this – it's two-fold: the privilege of passing on to other people the faith I have received, and the joy of seeing them grow in faith along the way. And its totally by grace – the grace of the Holy Spirit who leads, guides and supports all of us the whole time.

* Alice moved to the parish just before Easter and had been attending RCIA in her previous parish where she was received into the Church at the Easter vigil there.

Carol Ann Harnett

When I arrived at the first session of RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) in September I didn't know what to expect. I'd been learning about Catholicism for a while by myself but wasn't sure if I was ready to take the first step towards joining. Father Naz greeted me at the door and introduced me to Carol Ann who was leading the classes, they were very friendly and immediately put me at ease. I also met Jack, with whom I would enter the Church, and later on Izzy and Chris who will hopefully join us soon. We were given an overview of the process and could ask any questions we had.

In the following sessions we studied what Catholics believe, the liturgy and sacraments, the Christian life, and prayer. The classes

consisted of teaching, reading, exercises and discussion. Every evening would begin with some time for a chat with refreshments and we would usually end with prayer in the church. Sometimes we were joined by parishioners who were interested in the topic we were covering.

A month after we started, there was a Rite of Acceptance during Sunday Mass when we were officially welcomed to the parish as Catechumens/Candidates. During Lent we went to Birmingham Cathedral with all the RCIA groups from across the Archdiocese for the Rite of Election, where we were presented to Archbishop Bernard and Bishop David.

Finally, after a rehearsal, we were received into the Church at the Easter Vigil Mass: I was baptised and both Jack and I were confirmed and given the Holy Eucharist. We had a few more classes, at which we were joined by Alice (who had completed RCIA elsewhere) and Simon, culminating in a house Mass to celebrate the end of the course.

I'd like to thank Carol Ann and Father Naz for all their time and effort and everyone at the parish who has made me feel at home at St Joseph's.

Peter Hardman

The Bible in Fifty Words

God made, Adam bit, Noah arked, Abraham slit.

Joseph ruled, Jacob fooled, Bush talked, Moses baulked.

Pharaoh plagued, People walked, Sea divided, Tablets guided.

Promise landed, Saul freaked, David peaked, Prophets warned.

Jesus born, God walked, Love talked, Anger crucified.

Hope died, Love rose, Spirit flamed, Word spread..

GOD REMAINED. AMEN.

Contributed by Pauline Kirton

Sin

Christianity is obsessed with sin. The biblical history of humanity starts with it, and it is a perennial topic in Christian theology. The Church sees itself engaged in a perpetual battle with sin, which it sees as a defining characteristic of the human condition.

Life is seen as a continual struggle to overcome sin, and the goal of the Christian life is seen as the redemption from sin and the entry into Heaven in a state of sinlessness. We are continually being beaten about the head with the notion that we are sinful beings, and in this way we are laden with guilt and obsessed with the need for forgiveness. God is seen as the mighty Judge who holds our eternal fate in His hands. Fortunately for us, He does desire our redemption, and to this end was prepared to subject His Son to a cruel and violent death to free us from our sins - as long as we believe that to be true.

But what is this 'sin'? One way of looking at it is to see it as a breach of our contract with God. God undertakes to give us eternal life as long as we follow His laws and commandments and do not wilfully go against them.

We have already identified two problems.

The first is that Christian doctrine sees (wo)man as intrinsically sinful, as burdened by 'original sin' - but how 'original' is that? Did God deliberately create something that was originally sinful when we read time after time in the Genesis account of creation that God saw what he had created as 'good' - and in the account of the creation of humans in Genesis 2:7 "God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life". I find it difficult to believe that this 'breath of life' was 'evil'. God is good, and what he created was good, so perhaps instead of going on about 'original sin' it might be better to talk about 'original goodness'.

The second problem concerns the nature of love. God is love, and God loved the world - after all, He created it. For a teaching on love, we could do worse than consider St Paul's teaching to the Church in Corinth: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not

boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1 Cor 13:4-7) Or, to put it in a nutshell, Love is unconditional. So how do we square that with all the ifs and buts that the Church constructs around God’s love, as exemplified in Hymn 210 in the book we use every Sunday:

God gives his people strength/ If we believe in his way...

God gives his people hope/ If we but trust in his word?

The conventional answer probably goes back to the idea behind ‘original sin’ that we need to be told what to do, otherwise we will go completely off the rails - but will we? Darwin and Nietzsche - among others - wrote about the ‘struggle for existence’ and the ‘survival of the fittest’, but the evidence points in a completely different direction. The human race has survived through altruism and cooperation, through the creation of societies - and that is perhaps one of the elements of ‘original goodness’. When God created humans (and other species) as social beings, He knew what He was doing. He created a web of life, in which all beings are linked, and rely on each other.

Let us now come back to the notion of sin as a breach of our contract with God. What this does is regard sin as a personal, individual matter between me and God (which needs the Church to keep it on track). Now this is not to deny our personal responsibility for our actions, and it definitely does not deny the existence of evil - but evil takes many forms, many of which are beyond individual responsibility, and so make it possible for us to wash our hands of them.

For example: I am not responsible for the deaths of thousands of children in Gaza or for the displacement of millions of people in Sudan or for the inhumane way that refugees are treated in this country or for the fact that children are going to school in the morning hungry or for the high levels of infant mortality in NHS facilities.

Or am I?

Children in Gaza are being killed with bombs partly designed and built in this country under a government which aims for maximum levels of employment, regardless of what is being produced, or a government which sees arms sales as an important element in the ‘balance of payments’.

The education and health services in this country are being starved of cash because of an ideology which preaches that taxation is bad.

These things happen in our name. Do we raise our voices in protest or do we just shrug our shoulders and say “Well, that’s politics, which has nothing to do with my life as a Christian.”

Only it does. We have a voice, we are called to be prophets, to ‘speak truth to power’, to shout out against the injustices which cause the deaths of millions through famine, war and human greed. We are called to raise our voices in the face of the destruction of our environment.

By keeping silent, we are making ourselves guilty of sins of omission, by following a lifestyle at the expense of others we are complicit in what has been called ‘structural sin’, but I bet these do not figure too highly in the confessional.

If you have any comments on this article, please send them to the Magazine Editor >>merank@btinternet.com<< or to me at

>>m.townson1@btinternet.com.<<

Michael Townson June 2024

I dreamed death came the other night
And Heaven’s gate swung wide
An angel with a halo bright
Ushered me inside
And there to my astonishment
Were folks I’d judged and labelled
As ‘quite unfit’, ‘of little worth’
And ‘spiritually disabled’.
Indignant words rose to my lips
But never were set free
For every face showed shocked surprise —
No-one expected me.

When Fr Naz Feared for his Life

This is the third and final part of the talk Fr Naz gave last year to the Thursday Group.

Between 1985 and 1989 Fr Naz was a teacher at St Patrick's Minor Seminary of which he later became rector before he became the secretary to the Episcopal Conference in Malawi. Doctor Hastings Banda was the President of Malawi and at first was a good president. He was a very strict Scottish Presbyterian and was against women wearing mini-skirts or trousers, so much so that lady visitors from other countries who arrived wearing these clothes were obliged to wear wrapper skirts when they arrived. He became a dictator and made himself president for life; no one was allowed to oppose him and those who tried were imprisoned or worse. It became very difficult for the those who were highly educated, and many had to flee the country.

Eventually the Bishops' Conference decided that something had to be done because there was no freedom. Everyone was expected to sing the President's praises and the health and education of the people was being damaged. A team to draft a pastoral letter under the guidance of the Bishop's Conference was set up and a pastoral letter was written to be sent to all parishes to be read on one single day, 8th March, the first Sunday of Lent 1992. Fr Naz was in the middle of all this which was very dangerous for him because there were lots of agents reporting back to the president and he could be arrested as could the bishops.

The letter had to be top secret. Fortunately, the church had its own printing house, so this was not a problem. The distribution of the letters was a greater problem as there were roadblocks everywhere and cars were routinely searched. Fr Naz had to deliver letters to dioceses in the centre and in the north of Malawi and he decided to get help from the nuns running rural hospitals in the local convents close to the roadblocks. They were happy to help and hid the letters in an ambulance. The local police knew the nuns and waved them through, but as Fr Naz followed he was stopped and searched. This was repeated at several roadblocks and as a result the bishops' letter was read out in all of the parishes in Malawi. The Inspector General of the police was aware of the letter only at about 2am on the morning of the reading, when it was

obviously too late for him to do anything about it. The ruling Malawi Congress Party was very angry and called for an emergency meeting, declaring the letter seditious. Fr Naz as the key man in the letter saga, and all the bishops, were afraid for their lives. Fr Naz slept in different places with people he trusted because he was being hunted. Things were very tense in Malawi. The Inspector General interrogated the bishops for eight hours and tried to turn the people against them but the majority of the people in the country were in agreement with the bishops.

People surrounding the president wanted the bishops to apologise and they did not. During this countrywide tension Fr Naz was arrested, but only for a night. The volatile opposition to the regime countrywide did not permit for a clergyman to be behind bars because of the pastoral letter which had been greatly appreciated by the ordinary people throughout the country. The power of the people meant the government was forced to release him. The Malawi army as well was behind the action taken by the bishops, and they assured Fr Naz that they would make sure he and the bishops were safe.

There was an amazing response from the UK and other countries such as South Africa to save the bishops. An ecumenical team, led by the Anglican bishop of Birmingham of that time and which included a Fr Davis working at the Catholic Bishop's Conference, jetted into Malawi to show solidarity with the Catholic bishops there.

After serving the Episcopal Conference of Malawi for five years, Fr Naz went for a year's sabbatical to Boston College.

It would appear that our priest is something of a hero, acting so bravely in spite of the obvious dangers facing him. I am told that he is regarded as such in Malawi.

Di Walsh

If you Google *1992 pastoral letter Malawi* you can find more on just how important the letter was. *Ed*

We are in the world to step out of our comfort zones and reach out to those in need. We will only find ourselves by giving ourselves for others, for life is gained only when we offer it for others.

Pope Francis

A Week of Accompanied Prayer

Last month a group of St Joseph's parishioners and fellow Christians met daily for five days. Anne King and Jane Long led us in a week of guided prayer.

I thought initially, "I have no time", "Do I really need this?" and countless other excuses.

Once I agreed, however, I gave myself to the commitment of one hour a day to be guided in prayer and it became a real gift. A God given gift.

It was a challenge and an eye opener. And a fulfilling feeling of becoming even closer to God. An examination of my faith.

Each person had a different story to tell but in general when this is offered to us again I would recommend considering this wonderful week. A week when thoughts and prayers and the way we live our faith are looked at and hopefully improved. Two lines from a blessing which we were given and which stayed with me are:

May you succumb to the danger of growth

And

May you know that you are ever-embraced in the kind circle of God.

Susan van Ling

A small boy was attending his first wedding. After the service, his cousin asked him, "How many women can a man marry?"

"Sixteen," the boy confidently replied. His cousin was amazed that he had an answer so quickly.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Easy," the small boy said. "All you have to do is add it up, like the priest said. 4 better, 4 worse, 4 richer, 4 poorer."

Thank You as always to our wonderful contributors, both the volunteers and the volunteered. Please keep the copy coming, and watch the bulletin for the next copy day.