

Saints ALIVE

The magazine of:
All Saints, Leighton Buzzard
St. Nicholas, Hockliffe
St. Michael's, Eggington
St. Michael and All Angels,
Billington
The Good Shepherd, Sandhills

October 2020

60p

Inside:

Fr Bernard

proposes that God stands
love against all else:

in the challenge
of suffering;

and in learning to let God's
love shape us through prayer.

Virtual singing:

The choir learned the art

We look forward to Harvest:

in words and pictures from
around the team;

CoGs looks at the world
through a brighter lens;

Billington watches the
changing seasons even in
Lockdown;

Eggington celebrates
progress with building work;

And

Hockliffe will celebrate
a Golden Wedding.



All Saints Leighton Buzzard

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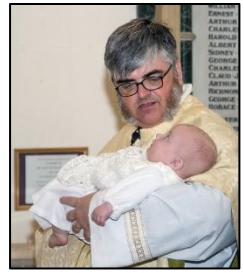
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Walking away from Omelas

By Rev'd Dr. Bernard Minton



In the short story by Ursula Le Guin, there is a town called Omelas. It is perfect, in every way. Nobody who lives there is sad, or poor, or unfulfilled. Everyone who lives there, has a life full of joy and wonder and beauty. The children are loved, and grow up strong and happy. And when they come of age, they are shown the secret that lies at the heart of this perfection.

They are blindfolded and taken into a secret cellar, deep under Omelas, where a child is imprisoned alone in a cell in the dark cold damp. The child is terrified and desperate, and the one who is coming of age is told that this is the condition of everything in Omelas. This one imprisoned child suffers for ever, so that everyone else might flourish. Every adult in Omelas knows this: every single one was brought here, when they came of age. This is how it must be. The perfection of Omelas demands this sacrifice. There is no other way.

Then the one who is coming of age leaves the cellar, and is able to resume their happy life. They live as they did before, enjoying the perfection of the City. They grow up and marry and have children of their own, who will one day be taken to the cellar, as they were. Omelas is full of people.

But every so often, there is one who can't. Perhaps straight away, perhaps after months or years, there are always a few – not many, but one or two each year – who simply leave this eternal perfection: who are last heard of, as the title of the story suggests, 'Walking away from Omelas'. The few who make a different choice; for whom this perfection comes at too high a cost.

It is a dramatisation of the debate in Dostoyevsky's 'The Brothers Karamazov' between the atheist student Ivan and his novice monk younger brother Alyosha. Alyosha has to agree with Ivan: that if the world as God has made it regards the suffering of children as a necessary price for creation, then the price is too high. He also, as it were, 'walks away from Omelas'. But Alyosha does not stop loving, nor (I think) does he stop being a monk. He clings on to love, even in the absence of faith or hope, and without a reason to give.

Soon, Christmas will be upon us! And who knows how it will turn out this weird year. But one thing never changes: the heart of the Feast. God becomes a child, and inhabits the cell in the cellar. God becomes a child and suffers the darkness of evil and death. God responds to suffering, by suffering Himself, standing love against everything, and making death merely a gateway.

"If I say, "Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to Thee, the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with Thee."

Father Bernard

Our present pattern of services across the Ouzel Valley Team

All Saints

Sundays:

Please note new times which allow for cleaning between services

8am Holy Communion

9.30am Parish Eucharist

11.30am

1st & 3rd Sunday (until Jan 1st 2021):

All Age "Service with a difference"

2nd & 4th Sunday Holy Baptism

6pm Said Evening Prayer

3rd Sunday: followed by Benediction

Weekdays:

Holy Communion

7.30pm Tuesday

(Service of Healing on 3rd Tuesday)

12.00pm Wednesday (**Not presently happening.**)

10.00am Thursday

9.00am Saturday

Morning Prayer: St. Hugh's Chapel

9.00am Monday – Friday

Evening Prayer: St. Hugh's Chapel

4.30pm Monday – Friday

St. Barnabas, Linslade

Sundays:

8am Said Eucharist

10am Parish Eucharist

6pm Evensong

www.linslade-parish.org.uk

During Lockdown, services in Heath & Reach, Eggington and Hockliffe are being shared by Zoom from each church in rotation at 10am. For details please contact Fr Noel McGeeney.

St. Leonard's, Heath & Reach

Sundays: Occasional services

8am Holy Communion

For details please visit:

www.saintleonardschurch.com

St. Michael's, Eggington

Sundays: Occasional services

St. Nicholas', Hockliffe

Sundays: Occasional services

St. Michael's and All Angels, Billington

Sundays:

11.15am Morning Prayer

Good Shepherd, Greenleas School, Sandhills:

Sundays at 9.45am:

1st & 3rd: Communion

2nd: Messy Church

4th: All Age Worship

Service times may vary.

For details of services and all other events, please see the websites.

Sunday Saints: for age 3+ year olds, meets during 9.30am Sunday service at All Saints.

All Saints Toddler Time: meets in All Saints on Wednesdays during term time.

Morning session 9.30 – 11am every week; afternoon session 1.30pm-3pm, except 1st Weds of month. £1.50 per parent / carer & child; 50p extra per child; refreshments included: **will restart in October**

ACTIVE: (Senior Youth Group for age 11+) **not meeting at present because of a lack of leaders.**

If you could help, please contact the office.

Young Adults: meets fortnightly on Tuesdays at 8pm. See Facebook page "All Saints Young Adults".

New Beginnings Bereavement Support Café, offering friendship, support and understanding

1st Sunday of the month, 2.30-4pm The Spire Coffee Shop, All Saints. (**Not meeting at the moment.**)

Choir Practice: Friday evenings, 7pm for 30 minutes for all members.

Bellringers: Practice on Monday, 7.30pm-9.30pm.

Spire Coffee Shop: Tuesday, Friday & Saturday 10am-2pm. **NOW OPEN.**

Contact Details on Page 2.

News Roundup

Sunday School is now operating and your children are most welcome, from the age of 3 upwards, to join the Leaders. However due to new guidelines, parents cannot accompany them. If this is a problem and you need to take your child out, the toy cupboard in the NT is open and you can still hear the service in there.

*** **

Please support the finances of the church by agreeing to take some Grand Draw tickets to sell to friends and family. First prize is £250 in cash. Jenny Huskisson will have ticket books available each Sunday. It will be drawn on Saturday 7th November at the Winter Warmer Food and Craft Fayre.

*** **

St. Nicholas APCM will be held on Monday 19th October, 7.30pm via Zoom. Please contact Fr. Noel for the Zoom link if you wish to take part in the meeting.

*** **

Reminder that service times have changed: to allow time for cleaning, Sunday service times are now at 8am, 9.30am, and on 1st and 3rd Sundays, All Age Worship at 11.30. Said Evening Prayer is at 6pm.



Worth a smile

The language of church-going

BULLETIN: Your receipt for attending the service.

HOLY WATER: A liquid whose chemical formula is H₂O.

HYMN: A song of praise usually sung in a key three octaves higher than that of the congregation's range.

INCENSE: Holy Smoke!

JUSTICE: When your children have children of their own.

KYRIE ELEISON: The only Greek words that most Catholics and Anglicans can recognise besides gyros and baklava. (It means Lord have mercy)

PEW: A medieval torture device still found in many Anglican and Catholic churches.

PROCESSION: The ceremonial formation at the beginning of the service, consisting of altar servers, the celebrant, and late parishioners looking for seats.

RECESSIONAL: The ceremonial procession at the conclusion of the service – led by parishioners trying to beat the crowd to the carpark.

RELICS: People who have been going to church for so long that they actually know when to sit, kneel, and stand.

TEN COMMANDMENTS: The most important – and oldest – Top Ten list.

USHERS: The only people in the church who don't know the seating capacity of a pew.

Parish Registers

Holy Matrimony, August:

8: Thomas West & Wesley Fong at St. Michael's;
29: Paul Holbrook & Hannah Dobbie at All Saints

'Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate'

Holy Baptism, August:

30: Oliver James Jeeves, Jake Matthew Jeeves, Fabio Ron Bragazzi, Noah William Thorne

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'

R.I.P. August:

4: Helen Webster at Bierton;
24: Frances Tarbox at All Saints;
25: Anthony Pantling at St. Barnabas

'Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'

Years Mind, October:

1: Vera Delafield, Arthur Waldock, Henry (Topper) Baines, Diana Reynolds;
2: Walter Sandifer, Paul Kaye; 3: Elsie Plater 4: Sybil Lawson; 5: Jim Aris, Rita Styles, John Sandifer; 6: Winifred Hart; 7: Laurence Nash, Anne Gittins, Edna Forward;
9: Francis Williams, Hilda Plenderleath, William Delafield; 10: Sheila Twivy;
13: William Sutton, Rosemary Wells; 14: Gilbert Inglefield, Harry Tingey, Emma Smith;
17: Doris Wells, George Simmonds; 19: Hugh Harmer, Marjorie Duff, Adelaide Lack, Joan Lawrie; 20: Pat Harris, Andrew Craddock, Donald Butler, Eric Underwood; 21: John Skinner;
22: Harold Rolls, Wally Fountaine; 26: Grace Nash, Frank Pateman; 30: Helen Lau

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“I am the Bread of Life” (John 6 v 35)

Another academic year starts, and it has been lovely to see friendships, old and new, flourishing and our youngest children growing in confidence too. The children and staff have been amazing as they work together to learn new routines. We have adapted to our ‘new normal’. One of the biggest changes has been the way we hold our ‘new’ virtual daily worship. One class is spaced out in the hall, and each of the other classes within the key stage joins us virtually from their own classrooms.

This was the verse that rang out through our virtual worship today via a clip from The Royal Albert Hall. The children watched as the audience on the screen sang heartily!

*Guide me, O thou great redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.*



We listened to the message from Mr Heather as he spoke of God giving us the bread (food) we need each day. We were reminded that God cares for each of His living creatures. However, as humans, we sometimes worry instead of trusting Jesus and taking each day at a time.



In Matthew 6 v 25-27 we read *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”*

As we go through these times of change, may we learn to trust more and worry less! God will supply our every need.

Alison Quick



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On a musical note.....



Singing in a 'Virtual' Choir

I don't think any of us had ever imagined the concept of a 'virtual' choir 6 months ago, but in these strange times choirs have had to adapt like everyone else in society. Lockdown happened at the busiest time of the year for the choir, and of course for the church. When it became clear that we would not be able to get together to sing as a choir for some considerable time we discussed how we could continue to sing without actually meeting – the concept of the 'virtual' choir was born!

Each member of the choir would record themselves singing to a prepared backing track, then the individual voices would be digitally mixed together with an organ track to make a complete 4-part ensemble. Needless to say, it didn't turn out to be quite as easy as that! We soon learnt that it is much more difficult to sing in isolation than it is when you have 30 other people singing with you. Listening to the other voices helps us to keep in tune and to keep in time (well, most of the time anyway!). Also, there are the more subtle visual cues that you instinctively pick up – noticing when someone is about to come in or to take a breath. Of course there is also often a conductor to follow, even though Paul and Sian may argue that we rarely take much notice of them!



Mixing the voices together also had its challenges – people recorded in a variety of environments and with different equipment, so the volume and tone of the recordings was very variable. Fortunately the wonders of technology allowed us to normalise the volume of each recording to get the balance right, and to add in some electronic 'reverb' to enhance the depth so that it sounded as if it was in a big building rather than in our living rooms. One lesson we all learnt early on was not to listen to our own recordings! Listening to a recording of your own voice in isolation sounds very strange, but when it is blended together with the organ and 30 other voices then it somehow seems to work.

While recording as part of a 'virtual' choir was a unique experience that taught us a lot about how we sing, we were very excited to learn in September that we could start to sing together again. As I write this, we have had our first full-choir practice in 6 months – albeit, socially distanced in the nave and only lasting 30 minutes. We also hope to be able to take some part in the service in a way that is safe and follows the government guidelines. However, that still leaves us with some questions – do we still remember how to sing together in a 'real' choir while listening to other people and watching a conductor? And will the choir sound as good without the benefit of audio 'photo shopping'!

Calendar of Events

4th October Harvest Festival

Services as usual including

All Age Communion All Saints 11.30am.

Harvest PigNc planned for that day cancelled

to comply with the Rule of Six.



7th October: Baptism Preparation Evening All Saints from 6.30pm.

Because of government rules, only one family can attend at a time, so please contact Julie Dolton (7954 148128) to book an appointment.

10th October: Eco Church Regional Conference,

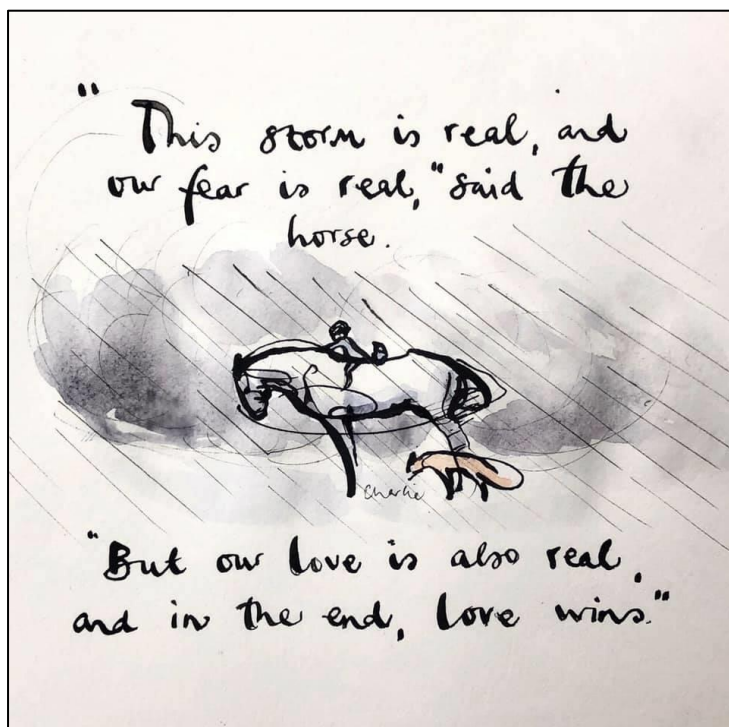
to be hosted virtually from All Saints 10am – 4pm. See page 11 for more details.

1st November: Bereavement Service at St Barnabas 3pm.

There will be an opportunity to light candles and pray for those who have died and those who are bereaved.

7th November: Winter Warmer Food & Craft Fayre

All Saints Churchyard 11am – 2pm.



Eco Church Regional Conference: Working Together to Net Zero



**Saturday 10th October, 10am-4pm,
to be hosted virtually from All Saints Church**

The All Saints Eco Church team are very excited to be helping the St Albans Diocese and A Rocha UK to organise and host this forthcoming online conference for churches of all denominations to learn how Eco Church can help us to cut our carbon and care for creation.

Sign up to take part at www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/eco-church-working-together-to-net-zero-10th-oct-tickets-117990349311

All are welcome, whether you are involved in Eco Church or not. Sign up for all or part of the day. Donations to A Rocha UK welcome.

The exciting programme includes webinar discussions, panel events, Q&As, worship and prayer, documentary videos and a virtual cafe for networking. There will even be an online bookshop specially set up for the event.

Guest speakers and workshop leaders will include:

- Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St. Albans
- Helen Stephens from A Rocha UK
- Catherine Ross, Open and Sustainable Buildings Officer for the Church of

England

- Jo Chamberlain, Environment Policy Officer for the Church of England
- Paul de Zylva, Senior Nature Campaigner for Friends of the Earth
- Judith Evans, Living Churchyard Officers for the Diocese of St. Albans
- Rachel Mander from Hope for the Future
- Caroline Pomeroy from Climate Stewards

...and many more experts in their fields.

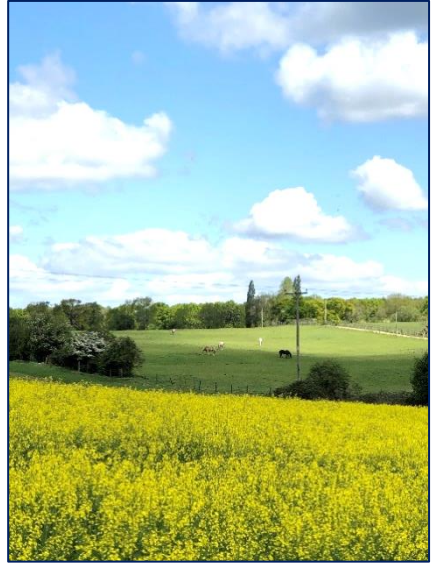
Workshops will look at topics ranging from climate change and social justice to practical architectural issues, from building effective relationships with your MP to the place of trees in our churchyards.

To keep up to date with the conference plans and latest news follow www.facebook.com/ecochurchcon or contact me, Esther Clarke eclarke75@aol.com or 01525 234130.

Esther Clarke

Harvest:

We thank you, then, O Father, for all things bright and good: the seed-time and the harvest, our life, our health, our food.



Sunflowers and sunshine
'The Beauty of the Earth'



A colourful and plentiful Harvest



We share with those less fortunate



And.....
Harvest Mice at Hockliffe

*With thanks to Suzie McGeeney,
Katrina Grant and Pam Cross
for these beautiful photos.*

***A message from
the Ouzel Valley
Bereavement Team
and New Beginnings,
the Bereavement Support Cafe***

NEW BEGINNINGS



-Bereavement Support Café-

The Bereavement Team have not forgotten the families who have been bereaved during these months since the Lockdown in March. During this time, losing a loved one has become even more poignant as rituals and funerals have had to be so different. Although we have been unable to make the usual visit to the next of kin or a very close member of the family, we have been praying for them.

Those who normally attend the Bereavement Café have also been remembered in prayer and receiving telephone calls from one of the dedicated members of the team. We hope soon to be able to resume these Sunday afternoon sessions (on the 1st Sunday of the month from 2.30 – 4.00pm), so that our Bereavement Team can meet (socially distanced, of course) to offer support and friendship. This is such a good centre for links to be made, mutual support given and friendships forged.

Services of Remembrance for the Departed are normally held twice a year, alternating between All Saints and St. Barnabas. The Service planned for All Saints in May had to be cancelled, and we are very much conscious that families bereaved this year have not been able to have an appropriate service in Church.

However, there will be a Bereavement Service at **St Barnabas on Sunday 1st November at 3pm**. There will be an opportunity to light candles and pray for those who have died and those who are bereaved.

If you are unable to attend please send names to either our parish office parish@stbarnabaslinlade.uk or to Fr Bernard at linladedvicar@gmail.com

And Mother Cate and the Bereavement Team are now working towards holding Bereavement Service at All Saints before the end of the year.



St. Nicholas, Hockliffe

Vicar: Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Tel: 01525 237633

Churchwardens:

Julia Dickens 210210;

Nerissa Walters 371615

A Golden Wedding

Nerissa and Bob met at the BBC Training School in Evesham, and were married in Hampton, Evesham at St. Andrew's Church on 10th October 1970. After a couple of years in London working for the BBC, they bought their first house in Linslade, (very handy for the daily commute to London) and then moved to Hydrus Drive on the Planets Estate in 1979, where they still live. They were blessed with a daughter Sian, born in February 1976.

Although Sian was christened at St. Barnabas and confirmed at All Saints, the family decided to attend church at St. Nicholas. Nerissa has been Churchwarden at St. Nicholas for more years than any of us can remember; and is also a Girlguiding Leader, running the 5th LB Rainbow Unit. She has been a Guiding member for 34 years and does a stalwart job of Badge Secretary for Bedfordshire, for which she was rewarded with a Good Service Award.



Bob left the BBC in 1992 and after helping to decorate the Church with the late Les Howard and Brian Speller that year, spent a year in South Korea installing a TV Studio, followed by 3 years in Holland with Sony, before moving back to work in the UK until his retirement. Bob now assists on the PCC, his BBC work becoming useful after retirement in the installation of the church sound system. He also enjoys photography and steam railways, making several visits to drive steam engines in Poland in recent years.

Sian left home for university in Roehampton before following in her parents' footsteps and joining the BBC. She now lives in Putney and works as Programme Scheduler for the UKTV Network. She loves musicals and is a member of two local theatre groups.

***Many congratulations, Bob and Nerissa
From all at St. Nicholas.***

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Tel: 01525 237633

Church Officers:

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Well here we are in the tenth month of the year, and it hardly feels like we ever got started. I have seen a Facebook post where the cartoon showed a lady looking at the calendar for December 2020, and saying that she wasn't going to count this year in her age because she didn't use it! However, if this year has taught us anything (other than how to wear a mask and sanitize our hands), then it is to make the most of the time and all the things around us which we are given. I have enjoyed the walks I have taken, especially in the beautiful warm sunshine we experienced, it has given fuel to get through these cooler autumn days of October!



In Eggington over the recent months we have had two great events outside the Church; firstly the work on the Vestry wall to repair the humungous crack which appeared last year, and secondly the felling of the sycamore tree in the churchyard. Both have made stark effects on the church and its surroundings, one definitely for the good and the other perhaps less so. Living in the village I have been able to walk down to the church and follow the progress from the first holes being dug, to the fine filling of the mortar. The walls now look like they will stand for another few hundred years or so. Let's hope they will continue to be loved and cared for by those who come after us. *[The photo above shows the end result on the vestry wall, which now looks very smart.]*

We have enjoyed being able to get into church for a "live" service. It is warming to be there in person, even though we have not been able to have the organ or live music to accompany our service. However we must thank Monty and Oswald Johnston who have done a sterling job in playing from their own home which has then been relayed through the Zoom meeting to us all.

It has also been re-assuring to share worship with our neighbouring parishes in Hockliffe and Heath and Reach. I feel it helps us all get to know one another better, even if we do not meet together in person. We have a wedding due to take place in Eggington on 3 Oct. We send our love and all best wishes to the happy couple, Mandy and Daniel; and hope that their wedding will be the start of a long and happy life together.

Anne Sheppard

St. Michael & All Angels, Billington

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens:

Sandra Brewin 373644

Julia Haviland 850380



6th September was a special day in Billington when the first Service since March took place in the Church. It was possible to resume services earlier but there was hesitation because there is not a lot of room in the building for distancing and only one door. We were also conscious that a lot of the congregation fall in the 'vulnerable category' and it was questioned whether people were ready to return.

The Service took the form of Morning Prayer, chosen because there would normally be no singing so there was no need to modify the format, and it provided a chance to see how things went. Nine people attended and Carl, our organist, played before and after the service. It was just so good to be able to light the candles and come together again after so long.

The plan is to continue Morning Prayer during September and then review the situation again.

Prompted by Rev'd Steve, I joined the Deanery Treasurer's Forum on Zoom. It was interesting to hear of people's experiences during this difficult period. The big question was of course how to fill the gap left in the Church Finances by having no collections or income from weddings, funerals and fundraising during the lockdown period. Our income in Billington is significantly down and we will be looking at how we can deal with this. One parish had encouraged all the church members who had cars (and perhaps those who did not!) to donate the cost of a tank of petrol which they had not used when they were unable to go anywhere. It seems people did respond to this and if this was encouraged across the team it could produce a substantial sum.

While we may not have been driving anywhere we have of course done a lot more walking. There are a limited number of walks in Billington and so although variations are possible we are often covering the same ground.

It has been interesting to see how the fields and hedgerows change on a weekly basis. We started in March with biting wind and rain and watched the new lambs grow bigger. We watched the grass and corn starting to grow and at the height of the summer we saw the field cut for hay then later a second crop. Now the combine is harvesting the corn and the first field has been harrowed in preparation for next year's crop. The summer has passed away as it has done for hundreds of years. Not even Covid-19 could stop that!



David Thompson

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Churchwardens: Steve Nixon; Hazel Farlam



Seeing the world through a brighter lens

It releases happiness hormones when we do this. It can improve your immune system and help you sleep. Marriages have benefited from this and friends will find you more likeable if you practice this. Your manager will be chuffed too if you do this as you will most likely be more productive. It's not available on subscription or as a prescription. Amazon don't even sell it. It's completely free and everyone can do it. What is it? Gratitude.

It has been proven by psychologists that regularly recognising and acknowledging what we are grateful for can develop a more positive outlook. It can train the mind to have a positive bias so that we spot the good more often and are less likely to focus on the bad.

As we enter Autumn with Covid cases rising and the economic impact of the pandemic becoming increasingly evident, it can be easy to just dwell on the things we can't have or do right now. But these negative thoughts can be turned around by just taking the time to be thankful for other people, ourselves, our natural world and God.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians: *"And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful". Colossians 3:15.*



During the summer, I asked members of our church what they were grateful for. Hazel said, *"I am grateful for the garden - especially on sunny days when there are lots of flowers and butterflies".*

Laura said: *"I'm grateful that our jobs have been secure throughout COVID-19. With so many friends and connections facing an unclear work future, having been furloughed or made redundant, it's made us value the stability and certainty of our jobs - something we definitely took for granted before".*

Katharine is grateful for *"being able to go for a walk in lovely countryside".*

Stuart said: *"I'm extremely grateful for technology. It has brought churches together, it brings families together and it keeps parents sane. Thanks to YouTube, Minecraft, Roblox and Animal Crossing for keeping our kids entertained throughout the school holidays whilst mum and dad fight for working space at home (which we can do thanks to technology!)"*.

Clare said: *"I'm grateful that this time has been an amazing opportunity to try new things to adapt to managing the challenges; Zoom calls bringing family and friends together, on-line food shopping and sewing facemasks for family and friends".*

Rebekah said: *"I am grateful for the sky. Bright blue, dark blue, black storm clouds, white fluffy clouds. I'm grateful for how I can look at it wherever I am and be reminded of the beauty of the world and God's awesome creative power. It also helps me to put whatever is happening into context and reminds me to take a moment to breathe".*

Patterns of Prayer

In a series of articles looking at different types of spirituality and the influences that inspire us in our lives of prayer, Father Bernard Minton discusses

The Daily Office



When I was a child, I went to bed with armfuls of soft toys. And once in bed, I often used to pretend that I and my companions were in a ship, or a spaceship, each of us a member of the crew, being carried off on adventures, or drifting with the currents wherever the tide took us, a crew united in our little boat, off making new discoveries. And that is my introduction to Praying with the Daily Office! Because that is one aspect of what we do, when we pray the Office. We climb on board a structure that carries us on a journey together.

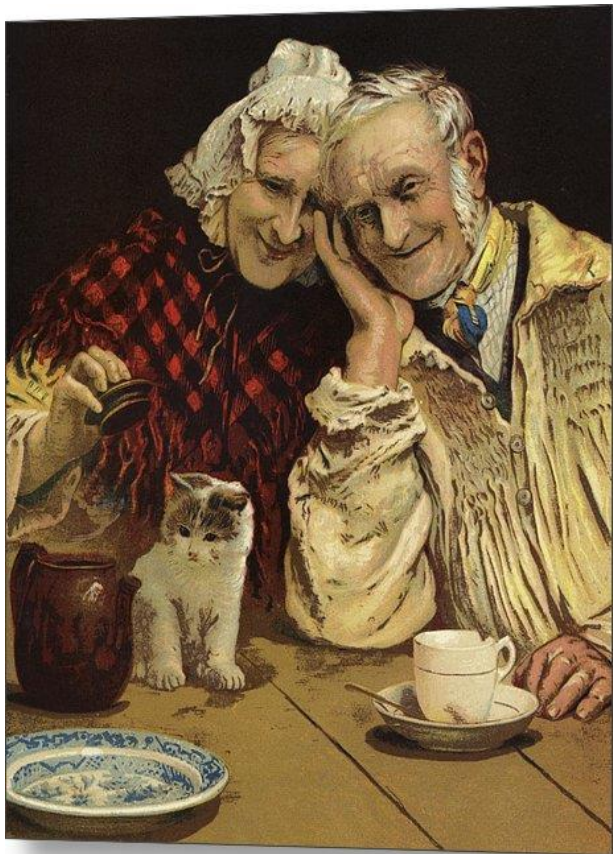
Praying the Daily Office is always and inevitably corporate. Even if we do it on our own, we are sharing in an order and a lectionary of readings with many thousands of Christians around the world and across time, and with those in heaven also. Prayer is about forming us into the people God wants us to be, and personal and contemplative prayer is a vital part of that, however we do it, but so also is corporate prayer: we are, after all, members of One Body. Our vocation is to be ourselves, in a communion and family with all God's other children, with whom we are called to pray and love and live.

We worship together, because God calls us to be together: praying the Daily Office is a way of praying together, even if we are apart.

There is also a learning aspect to praying the Office. In a sense, all prayer teaches us, because we come consciously into the presence of God. With the Office, we pray together, and we read Scripture together. And as we read through the Scriptures, we learn a lot about how our ancestors lived and loved and prayed. And some of what we learn is difficult or depressing, while some is joyful, and some is just strange to us. And all of that teaches us about what it is to be humans engaged in a conversation with God. The Daily Office brings us together with God, and with our brothers and sisters across time and culture, in a conversation and a lesson that involves us all, and in which we swap notes, and thoughts, and fellowship.



Lastly: another image for you. Prayer is about falling in love. Prayer is us learning to let God love us as much as we can, as fully as we can, and let ourselves be shaped by that. Sometimes, that loving relationship, like a human loving relationship, needs personal effort. You buy flowers or chocolate, you dress well, you spend intimate time together. You pray alone, in silence, in your own, deep-felt words or thoughts. You listen, and talk, together, just the two of you.



But sometimes, like a human love, prayer doesn't need those things. You can't be on a date every hour of every day! Sometimes you just need to be there, no matter how grumpy or tired you are.

Sometimes you just need to have done the dishes before they get up in the morning, or have made them a cup of tea, without having been asked. And sometimes love is just getting along, days spent companionably together, imperceptibly growing together, as you spend time in each other's company. And that is the Daily Office! The Darby and Joan of prayer!

Father Bernard Minton

*"I have held many things in my hands,
and I have lost them all;
but whatever I have placed in God's hands,
that I still possess."*

Martin Luther



The Rectory,
St. James the Least of All

On the perils of eating with members of your church

My dear Nephew Darren,

One of the rather dubious pleasures of being rector here is to dine twice a year with Lord and Lady Shuttlingsloe. I was summoned to go along yesterday evening.

As usual, I was greeted by the footman and led into the entrance hall, where only a few weeks ago we held the parish Harvest supper for 200 people. I relinquished my coat, took a deep breath, and set off to follow him down endless corridors to the drawing room. The house is rumoured to be haunted, but I suspect any sounds of footsteps come from guests of previous years, still wandering the corridors trying to find their way out.

There were the usual guests - most of whom were merely continuing conversations they had had the previous evening at another stately, decaying pile in the county. They were standing, because all the chairs were occupied by the Lord's dogs, and everyone agreed that the dogs looked far too comfortable to move. Since one aged golden retriever recognised me, having developed an over-familiarity with my own dog, he amicably let me squeeze beside him on a sofa - even if it left me for the rest of the evening looking as if I was wearing an Afghan coat.

When the meal was ready, the butler arrived with our overcoats, because the dining room is a cavernous chamber which is largely unheated as birds are nesting in the chimney. Lord Shuttlingsloe considers this perfectly acceptable, since his family have been eating in this way for the past 500 years, which is how long most of the present staff have worked there. Conversation at my end of the table was less than easy, since Lady S dozed throughout the meal and my companion on the other side seemed to hold me personally responsible for the Spanish Inquisition. Had I been, she would most definitely have been on my list for questioning.

As Rector, one has one's social responsibilities, but I confess, there were moments when I rather envied your own evening, with a meal on a tray in front of the television – in a warm house.

Your loving uncle,
Eustace

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