

Parish Magazine of St Giles' & St Margaret's, Oxford



July 2006

Free

The United Benefice of *St Giles and SS Philip & James with St Margaret*

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The parish magazine aims to provide an opportunity for us to exchange ideas and to share our experience of the Christian life. Publication date is intended to be the last Sunday of the preceding month, so copy should be sent before the previous Wednesday. Please send the editor articles, drawings, book reviews, parish news. The editor is especially grateful for material which has no particular sell-by date and for copy sent on disk.

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Dear Friends,

July 2006

During July, there are three commemorations of people who have had a very big influence on the prayer life of the Church. They are St Benedict (July 11th), John Keble (July 14th) and St Ignatius of Loyola (July 31st). For this reason, when it came to planning the theme for this month's magazine, we thought that it would be good to highlight the work of some of the people that have been most influential in shaping the prayer life of our church. A series of articles have been written focusing on the lives of these people and the contribution they have made. However, in this article, I will concentrate on the contribution of St Ignatius.

In the past thirty or forty years there has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in the work and teaching of St Ignatius. This is primarily related to the growth within the Church of the practice of Spiritual Direction. For those unfamiliar with Spiritual Direction, this is an ongoing process whereby someone strives to develop their prayer life with the aid of a Spiritual Director. The person seeking spiritual direction will have a regular meeting with their Spiritual Director, typically meeting every four to six weeks, when they share in confidence what has been happening for them in their life. The director aims to help the person reflect on their experiences and hence discover how God is working with them in their life. The director may suggest an exercise in prayer or Bible Study that may prove fruitful at this particular time. An increasing number of people are finding this process very helpful as a way of developing both their prayer life and a greater confidence in God's call and love for themselves. It is proving to be a practice which people from all aspects of the Church are finding helpful.

The origin of Spiritual Direction lies with the way St Ignatius went about the formation of people joining the Society of Jesus. Following a very powerful experience in his own spiritual life, which caused a radical change of course for himself, St Ignatius demanded that anyone wishing to become a member of the Society should undergo a 30-day retreat. Although this retreat is predominantly conducted in silence, there is a very definite structure to the retreat. Everyday the person undergoing the retreat has up to five periods of prayer, each an hour

long, which are centred on one or two Bible readings that have been given to them by the director of the retreat. At the end of the day, the person on retreat will meet with their director to discuss what has been happening in their times of prayer. At the end of this discussion, some new Bible readings for prayerful study may be set for the coming day. Over the 30-days, the person on retreat will be taken on a course where they are encouraged to experience the life of Jesus and relate their own life to that of Jesus. As the retreat progresses, the experience becomes more intense and challenging. Jesus becomes more and more present for the person on the retreat.

Now not many people have the chance of going on retreat for a full 30 days. For this reason, St Ignatius developed the idea of conducting a “30-day” retreat in daily life, the so called “19th annotation”. In this form of the retreat, the person on retreat spreads the work of each day of the 30-day retreat over a week. Hence each day they spend an hour in prayer and at the end of each week they meet with their director.

The practice of Spiritual Direction has grown out of the teaching that St. Ignatius outlined for conducting a 30-day retreat. However, there are two aspects of St Ignatius’ teaching on prayer which are worthy of special note. The first is the daily practice of prayer that St Ignatius recommended, the so called “Examen”. St Ignatius thought that this was the most important aspect of his on-going daily prayer life. It is a practice of prayer which takes about five or ten minutes towards the end of the day. When sitting quietly, the person is encouraged to reflect back over the past day. Instead of focusing on what went wrong, you are encouraged to focus on the good things that have happened, for these are the times when you were most aware of God with you. Once this positive reflection has taken place and you have dwelt on the good times, then and only then are you encouraged to remember the things that went wrong and discover why they went wrong. The purpose in this is not to bemoan your faults but to find out why things went wrong and learn from the experience. At the end of the period of reflection, it is often good to say the Lord’s Prayer, to remind ourselves of our correct relationship with God.

The second practice of prayer, advocated by St Ignatius, which is worthy of note is the way he advocates using your imagination when conducting a Bible Study. He encouraged those on retreat to really enter into the picture of the Bible story they were reading, indeed to even smell the grass they were sitting on at the time of the feeding of the 5000. In this way, your experience of life is brought into the Bible Study and things become more alive and real. Some may think that this practice is highly dubious as it is not based on historical fact. However, it is justified not by trying to recover un-recorded details of the Bible stories but by alerting you to the way God has been working in your life’s story which you haven’t recognised before. Insights gained from your life inform your reading of the Bible and visa versa. Your eyes are opened and you find truths in the Bible which have been lurking there waiting to be discovered.

As you can probably guess by now, I am a great fan of the contribution that St Ignatius has made to my own prayer life. Through his teaching, the Bible has become a much more powerful force in my life and I have been enabled to discover parallels and insights which would have been hidden otherwise. I have trained as a Spiritual Director and finished a three-year course in June 1996. I now have between ten and a dozen people who come to see me on a regular basis. I also visit my own Spiritual Director and have a supervision session with other Spiritual Directors every couple of months. Hence, the practice of Spiritual Direction that I offer is open for others to observe and comment on. One rule that I do apply is that I do not act as a Spiritual Director in an on-going basis to anyone in the parish. This would not work as the Director cannot give an objective view on the matters discussed.

I think that St Ignatius is one of the great teachers for a life of prayer and I would highly recommend people to enquire further. However, to reap the benefits of St Ignatius you have to be willing to participate in his advocated discipline of prayer. Not much benefit can be gained from an intellectual enquiry. I hope this article inspires you to make further enquiries and open up your own prayer life.

With love, *Andrew.*

John Keble (July 14th)

Along with John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey, John Keble (1792-1866) is remembered as one of the founding fathers of that great revival in the Catholic life of the Church of England which we call the Tractarian or Oxford Movement. Yet where Newman's is a celebrated story of personal pilgrimage and spiritual development – the young evangelical Protestant passing through the *via media* of the Church of England, and ending with the scarlet robes of a Cardinal in the Roman Church – and Pusey's one of both outstanding scholarship and doctrinal controversy, the narrative of Keble's life can be very simply told. Born a parson's son in Fairford in Gloucestershire, Keble came up to Corpus Christi College in 1806, where, four years later, at the age of eighteen, he took a double First in Classics and Mathematics. In 1811, he was elected to a Fellowship at Oriel College, where he was brought into contact with the sharpest and most brilliant Oxford Common Room of his day. He taught in the University, and was ordained deacon in 1815 and priest a year later. In 1831, he was appointed to the (part-time) Professorship of Poetry, a post he held for ten years; but he resigned his Oriel Fellowship in 1835 in order to marry. In the same year, he accepted the living of Hursley, near Winchester: and Vicar of Hursley he remained until his death, where he preached, catechised, visited the sick, and exercised an exemplary pastoral ministry to all those in his cure. Above all, he prayed: morning and evening, at home and in church, for himself, for others, for the Church in her distress. Preaching at the opening of Keble College Chapel in 1876, Henry Parry Liddon said of Keble that 'no man ever lifted so many to heaven without mentioning it.' Dr Pusey, who made his confession to Keble, wrote of him that 'he was all prayer at all times, though those only who narrowly observed him saw it, and he knew not that it was observed, else he would have hid it.'

This simple outline of Keble's biography, and those two out of many testimonies to his gentle prayerfulness and humility omit, of course, to mention the one thing with which Keble will always been associated above all else, the Assize Sermon, preached by him in the University

Church on Sunday 14th July 1833. This sermon, which traditionally marks the beginning of the Oxford Movement, might well appear to us now to be concerned with matters dry, obscure and trivial. Keble took as his theme 'National Apostasy', and the occasion of the sermon was the Irish Church Temporalities Bill, whereby the Whig government sought to organise and rationalise the bishoprics of the Church of Ireland and their endowments. The point at issue was not the reasonableness, or otherwise, of the detail of the Bill, but rather the fact that a Parliament which now included both Dissenters and Roman Catholics might presume to regulate the affairs of the English Church, and hence constituted a sacrilegious interference by the secular power. The sermon is a protest against the collapse of that ideal of England (and Ireland) as a Christian nation, her Parliament the 'lay synod,' and her Church the Catholic Church of the realm. After the Assize Sermon, Keble went on to contribute eight of the 90 Tracts for the Times, whose authors all urged the Church of England to see herself as part of the one Holy Catholic Church, and to regard her priests and bishops as no mere civic functionaries, but successors to the Apostles. They further urged a recovery of the sacramental life, and of the sense of the mystical and symbolical (as against the merely rational) in religion.

That sense of the sacramental, of mystery and symbol, of the relationship (shared with the Romantics) between the natural world and the (hidden) glory of God, penetrates Keble's first and best-known volume of poetry *The Christian Year*, structured around the liturgy and Calendar of the Book of Common Prayer, published in 1827. To any appreciation of Keble the parish priest and Keble the Tractarian must be added one of Keble the poet. Newman said of Keble that 'he did for the Church of England what none but a poet could do: he made it poetical.' As there is not space in this article to explore in any depth Keble's pastoral theology, with its emphasis on the way of holiness, on sanctification, and on our participation, through the sacraments, in the Divine life, let me end with two verses from the first poem in the *Christian Year*, part of which we now sing as the well-known hymn, "New Every Morning Is The Love." It typifies what one writer has called Keble's version of the 'sacrament of the present moment:'

If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask, -
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

Jonathan Baker

St Benedict - Patron of Europe (July 11th)

St Benedict of Nursia was declared patron saint of Europe by Pope John Paul II because of the great contribution to European civilisation made by his work. Not much is known about the man, not even his dates, which are given as *circa* 480 to *circa* 550, though some scholars would place him later. He came from a comfortably off family in Tuscany to study in Rome, was disgusted by the corrupt morals of the capital city in its decline, and retreated to the hills of Subiaco to live as a hermit. He was twice invited to be abbot of a monastery, but encountered difficulties, and so retreated once again to be a hermit. Other solitaries sought him out and persuaded him to found a community, which he did at Monte Cassino, between Rome and Naples. For this community he wrote his rule, which became the basis for all subsequent monastic communities in the Western Church. When Terry Jones (ex-Monty Python comic) screened a series of TV programmes on the Middle Ages he considered monasticism. He showed a picture of Benedict from an illuminated manuscript; it depicts a shrivelled old man with a long beard and a pained expression - the epitome of asceticism. From the Rule, however, a very different character appears, so that I imagine a small, quite rotund man, scurrying around the grounds of the monastery cheerfully encouraging his monks in their labours.

In his introduction to the Rule he writes: "We propose to establish a school of the Lord's service, and in setting it up we hope that we shall lay down nothing that is hard or harsh to bear." The Rule covers the entire life of the monastery, from the conduct of the Work of God i.e. the daily round of services, to the nitty-gritty aspects such as rations of food and clothing. It seems to hop from the sublime to the ridiculous, laying down the order of the Psalms for the services to ensuring that monks have time to visit the *rebedorter* (loo). The practical provisions display great common sense - food and clothing must be adequate for individual needs and for varying circumstances. The life of the monks must have been very similar to that of the local peasant farmers, and in many cases more comfortable because so well ordered.

The monk divides his day between prayer, study and manual labour. The motto of Benedictines is *ora et labora* = work and pray. Most of them must have been literate, since a pen is listed as an item of their equipment, and they are expected to read an entire book as part of the Lenten discipline. Aspects of the discipline may seem harsh to us nowadays, but they apply chiefly to those who insist on having their own way to the detriment of others. Benedict is determined to establish a community where "no-one should pursue what he thinks advantageous for himself, but rather what seems best for another". Every-one will have what he needs, not always what he wants. But grumbling is discouraged - Benedict regards it as a serious fault in a monk. He wants to build a cheerful, hard working, co-operative group, "so that no-one may be upset or saddened in the household of God".

The Benedictine monk takes vows of obedience, stability and *conversio morum*, i.e working always to improve oneself. Poverty (no personal ownership) and chastity are taken for granted. Stability is important; Benedict speaks harshly against the wandering monks who travelled from one monastery to another and never settled, thus never achieving any true spiritual growth. Obedience to the abbot is crucial, because he is in the place of Christ. The abbot has enormous power, but he is constantly reminded that as God's steward a full reckoning will be demanded of him.

Benedict's rule was based on earlier rules for the monastic life. Monks had existed since the 4th century, when St Anthony took off into the Egyptian desert. The cenobitic pattern was developed by Pachomius, who organised monks into communities. There was a third pattern, where monks lived a solitary existence but gathered together for worship. Monasticism was a movement of the laity - priests were attached to churches in cities.

Benedict was probably not ordained and does not expect to have priests in his community. The Rule of St Benedict was adopted for all monasteries within the empire of Charlemagne in the 9th century, and gradually it spread all over Europe. Despite periods of laxity and failure to keep the Rule, the Benedictines made a huge contribution to the development of European society in the fields of learning, medicine, agriculture and the ordering of society. Unfortunately, as Terry Jones pointed out, the leaders of society, kings and warlords, instead of adopting the Christian lifestyle laid down in the Rule, preferred to pursue their warmongering, leaving the monks to pray to God for forgiveness.

After the Reformation, monasteries disappeared from northern Europe, and after the French Revolution and Napoleon's activities they were suppressed in most other parts. From the middle of the 19th century, however, they have been revived, and now once again play an important part in the life of Europe. Several abbeys run schools - the best known in England being Ampleforth, Downside and Worth. There are also Anglican Benedictines. Most monasteries offer the opportunity for those outside to come in for retreat and refreshment of soul. The first time you go on such a retreat, you might be surprised by how comfortable and easy-going life seems to be! The Rule of St Benedict is not life denying but seeks to promote what is now called "the holistic lifestyle" - a balance of work, study and prayer which feeds body, mind and soul. After the TV programmes about the men who lived alongside the monks of Worth for a while, the abbey reported a great surge of interest in its life. Many people wrote to say that the programmes had caused them to reappraise their life and their faith, and had brought

them to renew their religious practice. Benedict would have been delighted to hear that!

His Rule lives on in many hidden ways in the Church of England and perhaps influences us more than we realise. When Cranmer drew up the Book of Common Prayer he took the seven Hours of the Benedictine day and collapsed them into Morning and Evening Prayer. His hope was that every Anglican would attend these services daily and benefit in the same way that the monks had done from regular worship. The new prayer book - Common Worship - provides for four "hours", adding "Prayer During the Day" and "Compline" to Morning and Evening Prayer, and expressing the hope that lay people as well as clergy will make use of these.

The history of our church has contained many people who have encouraged the Benedictine pattern of holistic living, combining work in the world with a lively prayer life. Think of George Herbert, Thomas Traherne and William Law; there must be many more, but I haven't read them! One little book which I found very helpful in my own life is "Seeking God" by Esther de Waal, written as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 1984. She lived in Canterbury Cathedral as wife of the Dean, studied the Rule and interpreted it for modern living. Its flexibility is such that it can still provide spiritual guidance for Christians of the 21st century. The patron saint of Europe continues to encourage his spiritual children.

Margaret Hollis

Comparing St Gregory and St Clare

St Gregory: a negative example

No doubt Saint Gregory, Pope 590 - 604, deserves his appellation “the Great”. The epithet is not just there to distinguish him from St Gregory of Nyssa or St Gregory of Nazianzus or St Gregory Palamas, all of whom are important to Eastern Orthodox students of prayer. However, I personally find that St Gregory the Great reinforces in me the impulse to pray quite differently from the tradition with which he is associated.

In the field of prayer, Gregory is best known for the “Sacramentary” (prayer book) which bears his name. Some of the contents have filtered through to the Church of England in translation by Archbishop Cranmer. Many of the collects of the 1549 Prayer Book, which have come down to us in the 1662 *BCP* and - modernised - in *Common Worship*, are either lifted whole or adapted from the Gregorian Sacramentary. In our benefice they often form the starting-point for sermons from the Revd Professor Michael Screech.

The collect is a sophisticated literary form, of pagan origin, and peculiar to Western Christianity. It appears to have evolved in Rome during the fifth century, under Saint Leo the Great (Pope, 440 - 461). Take, for example, the one set by the *BCP* for Trinity IV, which we shall use on the 9th. It is a direct, but by no means slavish translation from the Gregorian Sacramentary - rather stylish, in fact. The structure follows a standard pattern:

I ADDRESS (as usual, to the Father)

“O God,

II INTRODUCTION (the particular divine attribute to which appeal is to be made)

“the protector of all that trust in thee,
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:

III PETITION (a single request)

“increase and multiply upon us thy mercy;

IV PURPOSE (what we hope granting the petition will achieve)

“that, thou being our ruler and guide,

we may so pass through things temporal, [*“bona temporalia”*]
that we finally lose not the things eternal;

V CONCLUSION (pleading through Christ, our only mediator and advocate)

“Grant this, O heavenly Father,
for Jesus Christ’s sake our Lord.”

Amen! All very neat: theological thoughts crisply orthodox, nicely sewn up, and embellished with beautiful language. Fine phrase upon fine phrase ...

The trouble is, for me it is all too contrived. I don’t much care for it in church: it conveys the impression that liturgy is something done for the laity by an educated clergy, instead of something we all do together by the power of the Holy Spirit. And I certainly don’t pray like that at home. After all, in the New Testament Jesus invites us to pray to “Daddy” (*“Abba”*). That is everyday, childlike language, not oratory. However good it is, how could human rhetoric ever match the majesty of the Lord?

So: sorry, St Gregory, I really admire your work as a Church administrator, but I’m voting you out of the house of prayer instruction. Roll on instead ...

St Clare: a positive example

Words and Saint Clare of Assisi don’t really mix. Her friend, Giovanni Bernadone, was the wordsmith - nicknamed “Francis” because he wrote poetry in the fashionable French tradition. The lady herself spent most of her life in silence and seclusion.

As St Francis explained:

“What Clare and the other sisters [in her newly-formed religious order] do is what Jesus was doing in the crib, and on the cross: praying. That is what His life was about. Clare knows this, and that is how she serves Jesus. She prays and her sisters pray.”

- “But we pray too,” objected the Friars Minor, “and we go out and preach.”

- “Yes,” replied Francis, “we go and preach. But Clare goes with us too because she is in Jesus, and it is Jesus who speaks through us ...”

Praying in the spirit of Clare means:

- silence (mostly!) because - as men like St Gregory Palamas in the hesychast tradition have explained at great length - as we draw nearer to God, the intellect enters a realm of unknowing: the Uncreated Light is to us darkness
- praying with and through the ordinary stuff of life, the dramatic moments (like when the convent was surrounded by marauding Saracens in the middle of the night) and the everyday. For example, as many of you know, I play bowls. If I pick up a wood and feel its weight before delivering, it reminds me how much God loves each one of us, including the opposing team. I rest the wood in my hand in a “cradle grip”: God holds each one of us in his hand, lovingly and gently. I send the wood down to where my skip wants it (to within 3” if I am playing well) and it will get knocked about in the course of the end: God has a purpose for each one of us (He never wastes a wood!), but it may not be a pleasant experience for us. &c.

Praying like St Clare is something anyone can do!

Jennifer Brooker

Thomas Cranmer

It was Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) who put the memorable words for public worship into English-speaking mouths. His greatest creation, *The Booke of the Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacramentes and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Churche After the Use of the Churche of England*, appearing first under the keenly Protestant auspices of Edward VI, is second only to Tyndale’s Bible of 1525-35 as a founding text of English Christian consciousness, selfhood, language.

Cranmer made his *Book* even more Reformed in 1552 (pressed especially by Protestant exiles from the continent). It was banned under Roman Catholic Mary (who had its main promoter and author and editor burned to death in Oxford March 21 1556: the day the Church of England celebrates him). Elizabeth’s Protestant Act of Uniformity reinstated the *Book* more or less intact in 1559. It survived Cromwell’s Presbyterian commonwealth, and with scarcely any modification became at the Restoration in 1662 the *Prayer Book* which until very recently *was* Anglican Christianity.

Cranmer was, of course, a royalist, Henry VIII’s keenest ecclesiastical sideman in the struggle against Roman jurisdiction, obsessive about order in the church as in the state, but above all dedicated in the high democratic Reformation spirit to making the words of public worship, and so the theology and religion they served, as clear and comprehensible, and thus as saving, as could be. Everything was to be in English, not Latin; audible (the priest facing the people); and memorable (congregation, eg, repeating the Lord’s Prayer, line by line, after the minister). The practice the Book endorsed was emphatically not Roman (communion in two kinds; no prayers to saints; and so on). So was its theology. Cranmer worked very hard to make it clear that the mass was a memorial feast and not a reenactment of Christ’s sacrificial death, and that salvation was by grace through faith and not by good works. The Communion Service is as didactic about these things as the Lutheran-Calvinist Articles 29-31 which are especially ascribed to him.

But the Book is not just didactic, it's also, and even more tellingly, a primer in devotion. Devotion promoted wonderfully in the extraordinarily affecting cadences of Cranmer's Prayer of Humble Access ('We do not presume...'), and General Confession ('We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep'), and Grace ('The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost...'), and Benediction (The peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds...'), but above all in Cranmer's pinnacle of devotional prose, his Collects. Some are translated more or less straight from the Latin originals; a few are brand new; most are cunningly adapted and expanded for clarity and emphasis. What I notice and relish most of all about Cranmer's words is the way he keeps doubling up his words, and thus the concepts, wherever he can. The paired, doubling phrase is Cranmer's speciality. *Erred and strayed; all perils and dangers; holy and undefiled; devices and desires; keep your hearts and minds; manifold and great mercies; the knowledge and love of God; be amongst you and remain with you.* Two, all over the place, for the price of one (very often of the old Latin one). And, of course, the more memorable for it. It's a repetition that's a kind of rhyme – the basic verbal activity of poetry. It's a balanced rhythm of phrase and idea that the English language had started to love as soon as it was recognisably English. A repetitive balancing act English would go on loving after Cranmer. Shakespeare would relish it. We relish it still (*young and old*, we take to it, this linguistic *device and desire*, like *fish and chips* or *strawberries and cream*; it's evidently *part and parcel* of what satisfies our innermost linguistic being). It's a now deeply instated mnemotechnical linguistic mode – as posh literary criticism might call it – and it's what Cranmer helped so marvellously to instate in English – and all, of course, in the service of making God-thoughts so accessible and memorable for the English congregation.

Valentine Cunningham

Two Anniversaries from Roman Britain

25 July this year is the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of the emperor Constantine at York. Celebrations include an international exhibition exploring the culture of his time, a conference and a service in the Minster. The reason of course lies in Constantine's vision of Christ half a dozen years later before a crucial battle against a rival, Maxentius, at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome on October 28, AD 312. There has been much dispute as to the course of his conversion from this time (or even before) until his baptism just before his death in 337 but it was surely genuine. As emperor Constantine was a tough and resourceful ruler and, like King David, he was responsible for some very questionable acts but nevertheless he believed himself to be elected as God's deputy on earth. His last words to his assembled court were: *I know that I am in the true sense blessed, that now I have been shown worthy of immortal life, that now I have received divine light.* Instead of a traditional Roman funeral he was interred with the relics of the Apostles in the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople, the new Christian capital he had founded in AD 324 and named after himself.

We should be grateful to Constantine, for he reversed centuries of persecution of Christians. Amongst the martyrs who gave their lives for Christ, we still venerate is a citizen of Roman *Verulamium* called Albanus. His feast day falls upon 22 June, but this year it will be celebrated on Saturday 24, when pilgrims will be given the chance to follow the course of his final journey from the basilica where he was tried and whose remains have been partially excavated to the site of his execution (another part of the site lies under St Michael's Church). According to the story, Alban was not initially a Christian, but he gave shelter to a confessor, hiding him in his house. He changed clothes with him and allowed himself to be arrested. Brought before the judge Alban proudly proclaimed: *If you wish to know the truth about my religion, know that I am a Christian, and am bound by the laws of Christ.* Alban was flogged, and then led across the River Ver, whose waters parted for him, and up to a flowery meadow where he was decapitated. Excavation by Martin Biddle has revealed a late Roman cemetery here, but the martyrium built plausibly in the late 4th or early 5th century, was dug

away during the construction especially of the wonderful Norman Abbey which still stands, though we can still venerate the saint at his beautiful medieval shrine. We do not know when Alban was put to death but it is at least plausible that he was (as Bede suggests) a victim of the last (or Great) Persecution initiated by Diocletian and that the emperor in charge was, ironically, none other than Constantine's father Constantius I. Despite Eusebius' statement that Constantius did not actively pursue Christians, there would have been reasons of State to pursue anyone who blatantly flouted imperial edicts as Alban had done.

Who was the greater Christian, Constantine or Alban? The western Church has never accepted Constantine as a saint. For 17 centuries state power has enforced uniformity. Not only have there been persecutions of dissenters from outside the Church (pagans, Jews) but as we know from the carnage of the 16th century Reformation and Counter Reformation, other Christians too have been martyred. This is a history that leaves a rather nasty taste in the mouth. If one believes Christ's Love rules all things, Alban is the role model for us to follow. *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends* (John 15,13).

Thus I am not sure whether I will go to York to celebrate Constantine in July... but I will most certainly be lighting a candle at St Alban's tomb this June as I did last June. Here, very truly, is a model witness to the light of Christ for our own times.

On Constantine see the exhibition Catalogue *Constantine the Great. York's Roman Emperor* (ed E.Harley, J.Hawkes, M. Henig and F.Mee, Ashgate 2006)

On St Alban see *Alban and St Albans. Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions XXIV, ed. M.Henig and P.Lindley, 2001)

Martin Henig

Oxford Anglican Cursillo

Empowering Christians to grow through prayer, study and action

Seven members of the combined congregations met recently with Canon Marilyn Parry and a lay representative of the Oxford branch of Anglican Cursillo. The meeting had come about following a suggestion from Andrew that some of us might be interested in looking at what Cursillo has to offer.

Canon Parry explained that the movement had started in the Catholic church in Spain (hence the name), had spread to the US and then into other churches and countries. There are Anglican branches throughout the UK, but it had only been present in the Oxford diocese for the last four years. Its objective is the empowerment of ordinary, lay Christians to fulfil their lives and calling through support, review and community, and to encourage a proper balance between prayer, study and action.

Cursillo is based on small group meetings where individuals meet regularly to review their faith lives, perhaps every three or four weeks. These groups are usually cross-parish and not bound to any particular 'faction' within the church. They have a set framework covering the three areas of activity (prayer, study and action) based on discussion and review of each member's recent relevant experiences, though such contributions are entirely voluntary, and are not critiqued by the other members. The group is there to provide support and encouragement only if needed.

Individuals can be nominated to attend long weekend meetings which are held twice a year. They may only attend once as 'beginners' but are usually asked back a second time as helpers. The weekends are intended to strengthen the group experience and are claimed to have profound outcomes in the lives of attendees. They include meditations and short talks, most by lay members about the impact of Cursillo on their lives. Fifteen new members attended the recent weekend in the diocese.

The Catholic church in the UK has its own Cursillo (and joint meetings are sometimes held), as do the Free Churches, and there are offshoots in prisons and for the young.

Cursillo have offered us a shared group meeting so that we can understand more directly what being a member of such a group might be like. Thereafter, if people were interested, individuals could consider setting up a local group or joining an existing group that was more conveniently located for them. Cursillo would also sponsor individuals who wished to attend the next long weekend meeting (2-5 November).

The group that attended the meeting is now considering its response. Anyone who would like to know more about Cursillo is welcome to contact me (Ox 423478, john.clements90@ntlworld.com) or look at the website.

John Clements

To learn more about Cursillo visit: <http://www.oxfordcursillo.co.uk/>

Progress note on St Giles' roofs

The state of St Giles' roofs, and in particular the state of the Chancel and Lady Chapel roofs, has been the subject of concern for a good number of years. Successive Quinquennial Inspections have reminded the PCC of the increasing urgency, and last year (2005) we finally bit the bullet and committed ourselves to the re-roofing needed. This meant serious fundraising - the architect's initial budget figures suggested that the costs could be some £150,000.

The project got off to a shaky start with the rejection in October 2005 of a funding application to English Heritage, on grounds of Lay Rector

responsibility. However since then things have been progressing more optimistically. Tender prices turned out to be less than we had feared, fundraising is going well and the work will have actually started by the time this article appears. It is hoped that the work will be completed by the end of August, in time for St Giles' Fair and for the Roof Celebration on 23 September.

We are still a little short of the contract price of £104,000 - by some £22,000 at the beginning of May. Both these figures are inevitably moving targets. Funds, thankfully, are still being contributed and there are some interesting fundraising events planned for this summer - **come and support them**. However the building costs may increase if we get an unpleasant shock when the roofs are stripped and the full extent of the repairs necessary is revealed.

It is hoped that some 50% of the existing Stonesfield tiles can be re-used and it will be interesting to see how the newly sourced natural stone blends in. It is also going to be interesting to find out more about the Chancel roof timbers. A dendrochronological survey is being carried out at the same time as the re-roofing, and will give the beams a more accurate dating. A **competition**, with tempting prizes of champagne and air tickets, is being run to guess the age of the timbers in anticipation of the "dendro" results, which will be announced on 23 September. Do enter the competition - and as many times as you like at £1 an entry - to boost funds. Entry envelopes are available in church and at the summer events.

Alison Bickmore

Dates for your diary July 2006

Sunday, 2nd	THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
10.30 am	Healing Service <i>at St Margaret's</i>
Thursday, 6th	Thomas More and John Fisher
8.00 pm	SM PCC Meeting <i>at St Margaret's</i>
Saturday, 8th	
2.00 pm	Wedding <i>at St Giles'</i>
3.30-4.15 pm	Bell ringing <i>at St Giles'</i> - Oxford Diocesan Guild Festival
Sunday, 9th	THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
Tuesday, 11th	Benedict of Nursia, Abbot, c. 550
6.30 pm	<i>Le Comte Ory</i> by Rossini <i>at New College</i>
Sunday, 16th	THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
Wednesday, 19th	Gregory and Macrina
8.00 pm	SG PCC Meeting <i>at St Giles</i>
Sunday, 23rd	THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
10.30 am	Patronal Festival <i>at St Margaret's</i>
5.00 pm	VTBS Service <i>at St Giles'</i>
Wednesday, 26th	Anne and Joachim, Parents of the BVM
2.00 pm	Wedding <i>at St Giles'</i>
Saturday, 29th	Mary, Martha & Lazarus, Comps of Our Lord
2.30-5.30 pm	Bell ringing <i>at St Giles'</i>
Sunday, 30th	THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Weekly Services at St Giles' & St Margaret's

Sunday		
8:00am	Holy Communion	St Margaret
8:00am	Holy Communion	St Giles
10:30am	Parish Eucharist <i>with Sunday School & Crèche</i>	St Margaret
10:30am	Mattins & Holy Communion	St Giles
6:00pm	Evening Prayer	St Margaret
6:30pm	Evensong	St Giles
Monday		
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
Tuesday		
7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
7:15pm	Eucharist	St Margaret
Wednesday		
7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
12:30pm	Eucharist	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
Thursday		
7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
8:00am	Iona Liturgy	St Giles
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Margaret
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
Friday		
7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
1:15pm	Taizé Service	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
Saturday		
9:00am	Morning Prayer	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Margaret