

LITTLE S. MARY'S, CAMBRIDGE

*June 2021: No. 551*

# NEWSLETTER



*This newsletter contains:*

*In Praise of Hymns – Aquinas; A Personal View on ...  
Revelation; Know your PCC; Book Review; R is for Relics;  
News from Papua New Guinea; Garden News plus the usual  
Vicar's letter, daily intentions for prayer and more.*

# From the Vicar

27<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I write this the weather seems finally to be moving in a summery direction and I trust a cold and wet May is giving way to a nicer June. This makes me feel a little more confident about 21<sup>st</sup> June, although only because I'm cheered by the weather not because it means the Indian variant will take a hit or I have any scientific basis to my cheeriness!

One person recently wrote to me to say how much he disliked signing in for Mass and that he didn't want to be a sidesman at the moment because he didn't think he could bring himself to turn someone away if we were full. He wasn't complaining about what we were doing, and recognised why it needed to be done, but was just expressing sadness at the situation. It's not often there are advantages to having bigger church buildings or smaller congregations.

I couldn't agree more, and however keen he was or you are to see the end of the ticketing of the Eucharist, I promise you I am keener! It is very inconvenient, and requires you to think ahead, and gives me and Elaine in the office a lot of additional administration. Yet the far worse thing is that it runs so entirely against what the church should be: it makes it more like a club and makes it impossible for people to slip in or turn up on the off chance or be drawn in from the street. Body of Christ is of course something you join but coming to Christian worship is more than that and should be open to everyone. How can you join the Body of Christ if you can't see or experience what the Body of Christ does and believes?

Receiving Holy Communion in one kind is sacramentally sufficient but it lacks the symbolic richness of receiving in two kinds and it is difficult to focus the mind when one is standing, negotiating other people and

remembering to remove and then return your mask. As for the deleterious consequences of not being able to sing, don't get me started.

I don't know any more than you if 21<sup>st</sup> June will see an end to social distancing and mask wearing and the return of singing and the chalice at Mass. I pray it does but I'm not holding my breath.

The government tells us that it is keen to 'build back better'. It's my fervent prayer that it does. The church needs to do the same and I'm delighted to report that at our PCC meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> May we agreed to move ahead with our plan to appoint an additional stipendiary priest. This would be an Associate Vicar who will not only help with the general priestly tasks in the parish but have a specific focus on Christian education and formation (that we might grow in holiness) and mission and evangelism (that we might grow in number). This has been made possible by the generous bequest in the will of Michael Waring but will also need us to raise our game in terms of fundraising and giving – more on this once we're back to normal in church.

In the meantime can I urge you to pray for this appointment? Not only that it all proceeds smoothly but that we find the right priest and that we can grow together in faith, hope and love.

I also commend to your prayers those who are sick and especially Tim Wheatley who is back in hospital for tests; Ruth Davies who is seriously ill in hospital; Cherry Dainty who is also unwell; Janet Nevitt, that she may return home soon and Chris Nevitt, that he may begin to recover. One of the things I long for the return of is our monthly Healing Mass and trust that continued progress against Covid-19 will allow that to happen soon. May the good weather lead to good news!

With my love & the assurance of daily prayer for our parish and congregation, I am,

yours ever in the Lord,

Fr Robert.

# **In Praise of Hymns – the Writers of the Words: St Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor**

*by Charles Moseley*

Every movable feast falls early this year, with Easter being so early. And so the last major festival before the long green trudge up to Advent falls just into June, just when this newsletter will appear. Corpus Christi is not one of the most ancient of festivals, but it became one of the most loved, and was one of the most missed when the Reformers dourly suppressed it. This was the midsummer festival, the party time between getting the spring sowing and the lambing over, and the unremitting labour of haysel and harvest.

The doctrine of transubstantiation, after centuries of argument, was only made an article of faith in 1215 at the great reforming Second Lateran Council. Veneration of the Blessed Sacrament attracted increasing popular and often very emotional devotion, and it was St Thomas Aquinas, *Doctor Angelicus*, the subject (eventually!) of this note, who persuaded Pope Urban IV that it deserved its own festival. It was established, to immediate popularity, in 1246. It needed a liturgy, and Aquinas wrote one of the greatest of all hymns for it, summarising in succinct and allusive Latin the theology and especially the typology behind the Eucharist. We sing with great reverence the wonderful *Pange, lingua, gloriosi corporis mysterium* ('Of the glorious body telling', tr. J.M. Neale NEH 268) each Corpus Christi, to an ancient tune that our forebears in this church could – would – -have known. Sometimes the centuries elide and ancient devotion is very present

Its form and words deliberately echo the great Passion hymn of Venantius Fortunatus which we sing as the Host is placed in the altar of repose on Maundy Thursday: in Corpus Christi, the cycle, the sacrifice, is completed. Now we get on with the old clothes and porridge of Ordinary Time.

Tomaso de Aquino was born in 1225 to a noble family who were part of the nobility supporting the second Hohenstaufen Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II. His brothers were all trained for a military career, but Thomas was groomed to be the successor to his uncle as Abbot of the oldest Benedictine abbey, Monte Cassino – it was quite normal for families then to exert such patronage. But being a prince of the church was something he abhorred – it is said that he was overjoyed when, in a vision, the Lord assured him he would never have to be a bishop. So against huge opposition, which included imprisonment and the fury of his mother Theodora, he eventually joined the order of friars founded by St Dominic. This order, vowed like the Franciscans to poverty, chastity and obedience, was specifically a teaching and missionary order: punning on the Latin *Domini canes*, they were the hounds of the Lord.

His outstanding intellect and scholarship saw him rapidly attain distinction at the University of Paris, where was then the premier theological faculty in Europe, and he became regent of the Dominican house there. His work was wide: but his main distinction is his brilliant reconciliation of the newly rediscovered philosophical works of Aristotle with Christian doctrine and his reasoned opposition to the implications of the commentaries on Aristotle written by the sceptical and empiricist Arab philosopher Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1125-98). While there was a period (especially around 1277) when Aquinas' work was opposed as heretical, in 1567 Pope Pius V proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church. His huge (but unfinished) *Summa Theologiae* was one of only two books placed on the altar during the Council of Trent (1545-63) – the Council which launched the highly effective Counter Reformation. Pope Leo XIII in 1879 declared it the definitive exposition of Catholic doctrine. Dante places St Thomas in the sphere of the sun in *Paradiso X*, with the other great teachers of the Faith, and he was declared a saint in 1323. When the cause was being heard, the Devil's Advocate objected that there was scant evidence of miracles, whereupon it is said one cardinal snorted and said that every single article in the *Summa* was a miracle. In the marvellous fresco of the Triumph of the Church on the east wall of the Spanish Chapel of

Florence's Santa Maria Novella - the Dominicans' church - Andrea di Bonaiuto gave him central position.



Scholar, polemicist, poet – but also a mystic. He had several ecstatic experiences, and it is said that one reason he never completed his great work was a profound mystical experience of the glorified Lord he had served. He told his friend Reginald of Piperno, who urged him to continue his work, that all he had written reminded him of nothing so much as straw – utterly inadequate in its attempt to encompass the mystery of Creation and the Glory of God. We all, in our measure, know that feeling. His eucharistic hymns are still part of the Roman Office for Corpus Christi: *Lauda Sion* ‘Sing forth, O Zion, sweetly sing/ The praises of thy Shepherd-King’, *Pange Lingua, Sacris Solemniis* (sometimes called *Panis angelicus*, ‘Welcome with Jubilee’, tr. J. Aylward), *Verbum Supernum* ‘The heavenly Word proceeding forth’, tr. Neale, NEH 269, *Adoro te Devote, latens Deitas*, ‘Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore’ tr. G. M. Hopkins. *O salutaris Hostia*, ‘O saving Victim’ has been set many times (Charpentier alone set it six times between 1670 and 1690) and Gioachino Rossini used it as one of the movements in his *Petite Messe Solennelle* (1863).

Enough of the factual: I end on a personal note. I am no theologian, and most of Aquinas’ philosophical subtlety is beyond me, a distant peak I shall never climb. But under the guidance of a remarkable teacher, F.J.E. Raby of Jesus College, a young and very ignorant I read a lot of medieval Latin hymns and sequences. I was struck then, and am struck now, by the beauty of Aquinas’ verse, and even more by the way in which he manages to compress so much into so little, in so memorable

a way. Fully to understand the *Pange Lingua* is perhaps impossible, for good poetry is never amenable to prosaic summary, but as a statement of the mystery of the Eucharist it is approachable on so many levels. But it was written to be sung by those who had the Latin, and I can't help regretting that so many of those who have heard it over the centuries simply could not have grasped its beauty and subtlety. So once again we owe thanks to J. M. Neale, who made a glimpse of so much of ancient Latin hymnody accessible to us, late in time.

## **A Personal View on ... Revelation**

*by Neil Swan*

Writing a piece for a parish newsletter with licence to write about almost anything one wants, is a bit like submitting oneself to the psychiatrist's chair of 'Desert Island Discs'; the exercise is more revealing than it first appears. Far safer would be a request to write about the *Filioque* controversy or the engravings on a 16th-century communion cup. Yet perhaps teasing out revelation is an important role for a newsletter.



The first draft that I submitted for publication centred round a prayer that our school chaplain used which exhorted us to delight in simple things. I had constructed an essay that sought to show how a lifetime of experiencing the simple life of living on board small boats had shown me the wisdom of the chaplain's prayer. The editor's gentle suggestion was that there was too much sailing and not enough revelation about my own spiritual journey. Of course, she was right.

In my defence, I find it hard to describe something I am so uncertain about, yet paradoxically value so highly. That perhaps is why I ducked the revelation. What I knew for certain was that there was no point going back to the draft to contrive some moment of religious ecstasy while gazing up at the stars under a clear Caribbean sky. Lying is not a

good way to start a relationship either in print or in the flesh. Besides, I find it miracle enough that rain falls on our garden in Cambridge and that the grass grows.

As Maria von Trapp advised, starting at the beginning is not a bad idea.. I was brought up in a Christian family. We went to church every week. I said my prayers every night and was familiar with the bible stories. My mother had a brief diversion to Christian Science in 1959 when my sister was dying and my mother was clutching at straws, but apart from that we were either mainstream Anglican or Church of Scotland. For the first nine years of my life, my family lived first in Burma, then in Assam and finally in Pakistan, though Edinburgh was always 'home'. My parents had friends of many nationalities and faiths and during my childhood, it was a constant theme of my father that all religions were an attempt to gain an insight into the same mysteries. He used to say that had he been born Burmese, the chances are we would have been Buddhists.

My prep school in Winchester provided the cathedral choir, though I was not a member of it. Religion was woven naturally, yet lightly, into our lives. For five years I listened to church music and absorbed the language of the prayer book. At school, communal prayers were said twice a day and at night we said our prayers by our bedside. A few years after my sister died in 1960, my father retired as an oil executive and being a Scot, trained as a minister in the Church of Scotland. As a teenager, I went to my father's church in the mining community where he had his parish. I was never convinced that he concerned himself with the finer points of theology, being far more interested in the social good that he could do, using the church as a structure. My brother told me recently that my father, as he lay dying, had asked him if he thought there really was an afterlife.

In my twenties, I left the Church of Scotland and started to attend Old St Paul's in Edinburgh, a dark building squeezed almost out of sight off a staircase in the old town. It followed the Anglo-Catholic tradition and I felt instantly at home. After Judy and I were first married we lived in

the village of Ardeley in Hertfordshire and as luck would have it – because in the country one tends to take what one is given – it too followed the same tradition.

Thus far, I have described what I did, but not what I felt or indeed what I feel. Like my father, I harbour doubts though I don't confront them and try not to think about them. I was encouraged in this approach by a friend of our family, about thirty years older than me, who owned a boat I used to sail on. Wherever we sailed, he never failed to go to Mass. He had been appointed a Papal Knight and often chatted about lunches and dinners he had had with priests, Monsignors, bishops and cardinals. As far as I could tell, he and his wife were bound into Catholicism with even greater ardour than Lady Marchmain. Yet when he and I were talking about religion and I voiced my doubts, he cut me short, telling me that they did not matter. The important thing was to keep going. I wanted to know why he thought they did not matter, but he would not expand on what he had said and just kept repeating 'keep going'. Perhaps he realised that some things are not capable of being settled by argument.

On one of our sailing trips in the 1980s, he introduced me to the work of Stephen Hawking and was shocked that I had never heard of him. I have never managed to read Hawking's full work but the shortened summary that he wrote for the people who bought his books but never finished them, was enlightening. When I jumped to the end and discovered that everything in the universe was created from matter that was infinitely dense and infinitely small, far from closing the book on religion, it flung it wide open for me. The mystery had deepened. Another influence on me was one of the simplest and cheapest exhibits at the Smithsonian. It was a simple stick, possibly a couple of metres long, that represented the life of the world and showed by lines drawn round it when significant events had happened. Looking at the stick made me realise with shocking clarity that human beings have only just walked in – and at present rate we won't even be staying the night. Why is this important? Only to avoid giving ourselves a sense of over-importance. The world was spinning round quite happily without us, as

it will no doubt do again. Our Creator did not focus all attention on us. I can understand why some people try to strip out from Christianity the moral rules and lead their own version of 'a Christian life' but I think it mistaken. There is a value in coming together to make a common affirmation. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said in a radio programme on morality, if the institutions that promote morality are not supported, the morality will fall. Besides, it is hard to look at the miracle that is the world and the universe and not want to express joy and thanks to God. Who or what is God? There's a simple question. If I can't conceive of something infinitely dense and infinitely small, I am hardly likely to be able to conceive of its creator.

There are staunch Christian foot soldiers who have an absolute certainty of belief. I do not feel that certainty and am happy to accept that some things are ineffable. That is why I love the fact that the words of the liturgy are archaic, sometimes comforting in their simplicity but often hinting at meaning that can never be completely understood. It is my link with all who have pondered the same questions who have gone before me. A liturgy written in the language of washing machine instructions would have no meaning to me.

In stark contrast, a group of young evangelists whose Sunday evening service I attended in Méribel took a very different approach. Just before lockdown in 2020, we assembled in a freezing cold church and as they played their guitars and sang, the words were projected onto a screen. In between songs, they had long conversational chats with God as if He were a buddy on a FaceTime call and they were thanking Him for being a good host for the week. It was not my approach but as my father might have said, they were giving a different insight into answering the same questions. They were good people with love in their hearts. Perhaps excessive rationality is a problem of our time. In the past, people who thought too much were more easily contained. In 1696 in Edinburgh, a young theological student was hanged for blasphemy for expressing the view that God, nature and the world were one, though what sealed his fate was to say to his friends as they were walking

down the Royal Mile that it was so cold that he wished he could warm himself 'in the place called hell'.

Questioning is now more easily forgiven. I had an uncle who was described by the priest at his funeral as being the most faithful agnostic he had ever known. Every week he went to church but as a careful medical consultant who pedantically monitored every sentence he uttered for accuracy, he struggled to make the leap of faith. Unlike him I am prepared to leap though I don't look too carefully to see what is over the edge.

Have I fallen into the trap of revealing too much? I am lucky that Fr Robert recognises me as being a fairly standard example of the *Anglicanus Vulgaris*; I am grateful for that generosity of spirit because I appreciate that the parts of Christianity that I leave vague and out of focus are the parts that matter to others the most and are the absolute cornerstone of their belief. How does one reconcile being honest about what one actually feels with what one is expected to feel?

Can we coexist together? I hope so. Just as warriors say that few are not scared before battle, I suspect there are few who find questions of faith easy. In the meantime, I have my instructions from my Papal Knight, and I am not giving up.

*Neil worked as a lawyer in Edinburgh until 1983, then retrained at Manchester Business School in business administration. He moved to the southeast of England where he worked first in commercial roles, and then as director of legal services and company secretary for a number of listed companies. Married to Judy, with three adult children, he lives in central Cambridge. In 2020, he published a memoir called The Country Within about life growing up in India, Pakistan and Britain between the mid 1950s and early 1970s.*

# Calendar for June

TUE 1<sup>st</sup> S. Justin, martyr

WED 2<sup>nd</sup>

**THU 3<sup>rd</sup> CORPUS CHRISTI**

FRI 4<sup>th</sup> of the Sacred Heart

SAT 5<sup>th</sup> S. Boniface, bishop & martyr

**SUN 6<sup>th</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY after TRINITY**

MON 7<sup>th</sup>

TUE 8<sup>th</sup> Thomas Ken, bishop

WED 9<sup>th</sup> S. Columba, abbot

THU 10<sup>th</sup>

**FRI 11<sup>th</sup> S. Barnabas, apostle**

SAT 12<sup>th</sup> of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**SUN 13<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY after TRINITY**

MON 14<sup>th</sup>

TUE 15<sup>th</sup> *Evelyn Underhill, spiritual writer*

WED 16<sup>th</sup> S. Richard of Chichester, bishop

THU 17<sup>th</sup>

FRI 18<sup>th</sup> *Bernard Mizeki, martyr & missionary*

SAT 19<sup>th</sup> of Requiem

**SUN 20<sup>th</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY after TRINITY**

MON 21<sup>st</sup>

TUE 22<sup>nd</sup> S. Alban, protomartyr of Britain

WED 23<sup>rd</sup> S. Etheldreda, abbess. Ember Day

**THU 24<sup>th</sup> Birth of S. John the Baptist**

FRI 25<sup>th</sup> Ember Day

SAT 26<sup>th</sup> Ember Day

**SUN 27<sup>th</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY after TRINITY**

MON 28<sup>th</sup> S. Irenaeus, bishop

**TUE 29<sup>th</sup> Ss PETER & PAUL, apostles**

WED 30<sup>th</sup>

# Daily Intentions & Anniversaries of death in June

Those persecuted for the Faith	<i>Robert Loinsworth</i>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Friends of Little S. Mary's	<i>Elizabeth Roskill</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
A deeper love for the Eucharist		3 <sup>rd</sup>
A share in Jesus' compassion		4 <sup>th</sup>
The mission of the church		5 <sup>th</sup>

<b>Our Parish &amp; People</b>	<i>John Coales, Martyn Price Thomas</i>	6 <sup>th</sup>
Those taking examinations at the moment	<i>Molly Wiles</i>	7 <sup>th</sup>
Renewal in holiness for the Church of England		8 <sup>th</sup>
The sick	<i>Beryl Stone, George Lynch</i>	9 <sup>th</sup>
Medaille Trust	<i>Stephen Branch, Johan Procopé</i>	10 <sup>th</sup>
That we may be an encouragement to others in the Faith		11 <sup>th</sup>
The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham	<i>Geoffrey Styler, pr.</i>	12 <sup>th</sup>

<b>Our Parish &amp; People</b>	<i>Dorothy Otley</i>	13 <sup>th</sup>
Care of creation	<i>Ann Lamb</i>	14 <sup>th</sup>
Spiritual Directors & Confessors	<i>Elsie Watchorn, Maurice Latey</i>	15 <sup>th</sup>
Bishops	<i>Cynthia Clayton</i>	16 <sup>th</sup>
CamTrust		17 <sup>th</sup>
Prisoners of conscience		18 <sup>th</sup>
Faithful Departed		19 <sup>th</sup>

<b>Our Parish &amp; People</b>		20 <sup>th</sup>
Recovery from Covid-19	<i>Phillip Betts, James Duffy, pr.</i>	21 <sup>st</sup>
The evangelization of this country	<i>Hilda Rayner</i>	22 <sup>nd</sup>
Clergy and people of our Diocese		23 <sup>rd</sup>
That we may allow Jesus to increase in our lives		24 <sup>th</sup>
Those preparing for Ordination	<i>Caroline Latham</i>	25 <sup>th</sup>
Those preparing for Ordination	<i>Leonard Bones, Bernard Challis</i>	26 <sup>th</sup>

<b>Our Parish &amp; People</b>	<i>Margaret Shaw, Rumina Djelebova</i>	27 <sup>th</sup>
Faithfulness to the Gospel		28 <sup>th</sup>
Christian Unity	<i>Edward Roberts, bp., John Hughes, pr., Derek Lee</i>	29 <sup>th</sup>
Whitworth Trust	<i>Theresa Taylor, Elizabeth Wylie</i>	30 <sup>th</sup>



## **Know your PCC:** *Jo Wibberley, Churchwarden*

Thank you for electing me as your new Churchwarden and I look forward to working with my fellow Warden, Geoffrey Howe. It will be a privilege to serve in this capacity and I shall do it to the best of my ability.

What brought me to LSM? Anthony and I retired to Cambridge on 2nd January 1997, our 32nd wedding anniversary. The first Sunday we attended St. Bene't's, the second Sunday we came to LSM. On the third Sunday Anthony asked where I would like to go and I said, "Please can we go to LSM again?"

Was I always an Anglo Catholic? My paternal grandparents were and so was my father but until I left home, I was fairly central as that was the type of parish of which my father was incumbent. I was baptized at a little village church in Powys when I was three weeks old but I first remember attending church when we moved to Cambridge via Scotland five years later. At that time my father was the East Anglia area secretary of the Industrial Christian Fellowship without a parish, so one of my sisters and myself attended St. Giles' Sunday School, which in those days may have been held at St. Peter's.

Two years later we moved to Cornwall when my father became the parish priest, firstly of two villages in east Cornwall and then three churches in north Cornwall. Our life centred around the church and for me, it has done so ever since. I was the middle one of five children and it was a matter of course that we picked the flowers and decorated the church for festivals, picked the violets and made the posies for Mothering Sunday, made the palm crosses, sang in the choir twice or three times on a Sunday for Book of Common Prayer Matins, Holy Communion and Evensong and I even pumped the organ with the hand pump on occasion. For a short while I attended a convent school in Plymouth where I was introduced to the *Angelus* and the whole school

went to St. Peter's church for Mass on Ascension Day and Saints' days. Having recently been confirmed, it was good to experience something a little different.

I have since reflected on my father's influence as he involved me in more aspects of church life as a teenager in the second parish, which included playing the organ or harmonium when necessary – an ordeal for both me and the congregation –and later as sacristan. In those days, as a female I was not



allowed to be an altar server at a communion service; but through lack of suitable males, my father (called Tempie) used the senior choir girls to see to the servers' other tasks so we were known by the local clergy as "Tempie's serviettes"! With Lent groups being held at the Rectory, naturally we were expected to attend. Being thus involved had a profound influence on me and familiarity with the BCP and some of its beautiful language has remained with me. *"Our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful and that we show forth Thy praise not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to Thy service..."*

After I had left home and attended secretarial college in South Kensington, my first job was as bursar's secretary at The Oxford House, a residential settlement in Bethnal Green involved in the training of social workers. Anthony, teaching at Hackney Downs school, was one of the residents and he was also organist at the nearby church of St. James which I attended and where I was introduced to incense and other catholic practices as well as experiencing my first visit to Walsingham. I continued to worship here when I became the secretary to the Rector of Stepney and was involved in the administration of that parish (with six curates!).

Four years after Anthony and I married, we moved to Tavistock in Devon which was a lovely area to bring up our two children. When our youngest started Junior Church on a Friday night, the curate said "You

haven't an excuse now" and that was the start of 11 years' involvement with the children's church. I helped to organise events as secretary of the Social Activities Committee and it was here that I became a member of the Mothers' Union. During this time Anthony read for ordination under the Southwest Ministerial Scheme and served in the parish as a self-supporting curate whilst continuing to teach in Plymouth. Seven years later we moved to Leicestershire when he became a full time parish priest with a parish of five village churches, which proved quite challenging. In order to support him, I became a representative on the Deanery Synod and thus *ex officio* on the PCC, which also happened in the next parish too. It was not long before I became branch leader of the Mothers' Union – literally "over to you" - and this started not only my greater involvement in the MU but proved a further step on my spiritual journey. Four years later found us in Lancashire with just one church in a suburb of Preston, which was quite a contrast. Again I found myself fully involved and doing anything that needed doing, whether it was mopping up after the roof leaked, as PCC secretary or, after the Treasurer died, sorting out the accounts prior to the Annual meeting.

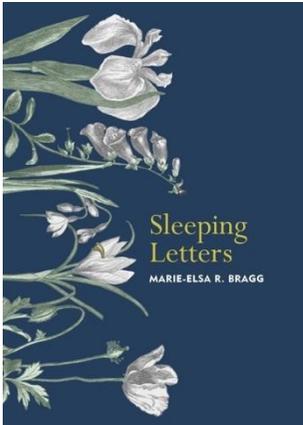
Soon after arriving at LSM Anthony obtained permission to officiate from the Bishop and joined the clergy team whilst I had a year's sabbatical. I felt very privileged when the churchwarden, Lawrence Fletcher, asked me to be a sidesperson and thus I joined the team of the many helpers who undertake the various jobs to ensure the smooth running of LSM. Having served as deputy warden since 2003 I am aware of the responsibilities I shall have as Warden. It is a pleasure to be a member of this lovely church family and I much appreciate the support and friendship you have given us and continue to give me since Anthony's death.

# An A-Z of Interesting Things

## *R is for Relics*

In Christianity, relics are the physical remains of a saint or martyr, or material objects closely linked with them. They can sometimes be whole skeletons, but it is more common for them to be a part of the remains such as a bone, tooth or hair. Sometimes objects that have been in contact with a relic, or clothing worn by the saint, are also regarded as relics (known as Tertiary Relics).

Such relics have played an important part in Christian ritual since the early years of the Church, and especially during the Middle Ages. The practice of placing relics within altars comes from the early Christian practice of celebrating the Eucharist at the tombs of martyred Christians (see also Revelation 6.9). Veneration of relics continues to be important in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity and in the Catholic tradition of Anglicanism, although it was rejected by Protestant reformers, largely owing to the abuses then prevalent in the church.



## **Book Review: *Sleeping Letters* by Marie-Elsa Bragg**

*Edmund Racher*

*Sleeping Letters* is a slim book, but despite the name, it is not strictly epistolary, but follows a pattern of the 'detailed choreography of performing the Eucharist' as part of 'the expression of an ancient ritual'. It is a narrative in prose and poetry by Marie-Elsa Roche Bragg - a priest of the Diocese of

London, a spiritual director - and daughter of broadcaster Melvyn Bragg and Marie-Elisabeth Roche. Her mother died when she was six;

*Sleeping Letters* acts then as a communication to both parents, as well as a personal exploration written during a silent retreat.

Some more particular description is probably required. A scene of life, or an imagined encounter, or some other passage is divided from others by a few sentences describing an item from or a portion of the Eucharist - bell, thurible, cassock, altar, lavabo, Benedictus and so on (worry not, there is a glossary). The scenes between these descriptions - often of family life or other memories - draw on plant life and the natural world. This is both at the wider level of the landscapes of Cumbria and the Pyrenees, and tighter in with mentions of a variety of particular plants and trees, or the frequent mentions of silt, pondweed and other natural ephemera.

Now I have gone through all that, I'm not sure that it works very well. Descriptions are woolly and unfocused, surrounding a central event we can have very little knowledge of. The detailed descriptions of the natural world are grim, inseparably mucky and messy, as if there is an insistence on dripping primordial slime onto every surface. This worked better from the Women's Chorus in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* - the central events of that story are well known and thus the grisly vignettes suggested by the chorus contrasted rather better against it. A more modern style of verse that makes up some of the Eucharistic interludes is thoroughly irritating, in that it refuses to settle and explore a single image, rather collecting a number of unfinished, contradictory, or partial images. People 'wait to the west with hope/without hope/buried in hope'. It is like the frayed end of a rope, in need of whipping together. The gathered images stare mutely at you, seemingly expecting you to instantly intuit a precise inner meaning from the purely descriptive. Perhaps the lack of focus is rather the point - but it still reminds me uncomfortably of the sort of ill-disciplined rhetoric that praises community or growth without ever suggesting what kind of community the speaker would like to see, or what the subjects that are growing will grow into.

At this point Bragg has some cause to call me an unfeeling clod. However, there are several memorable passages and aspects *Letters* that remain valuable. The ritual structure is slow and systematic in its exploration, if with the occasional note of Bathos. There are pieces of imagery that remind me of Julian of Norwich in their starkness and drama, and discerning passages that I will revisit. I'm not sure if we should ask for much more than that from such a personal work.

*The LSM Zoom Reading Group will be discussing Sleeping Letters on Saturday 12th June at 8pm – if you'd like to join in, please contact the Editor.*

## **New Bishop for New Guinea Islands**

The latest from ACPNG is that Fr Reginald Makele has been elected as the next Bishop of New Guinea Islands Diocese.

Fr Reginald Makele, 51, is from Sag Sag in the Cape Gloucester area of West New Britain. He is married to Cathlyn – also from West New Britain – and they have three children: Abel, Ruth and Junior Reg. He has spent much of his ministry in Port Moresby, including Gerehu and Morata parishes, and as Bishop's Chaplain and Dean of the Cathedral. He is currently the Anglican Chaplain to the Police.

A date for his consecration has yet to be announced, meanwhile prayers and good wishes to the Makele family and all in NGI Diocese.



*Fr Makele and family*

# Garden News



A female blackbird has for a few weeks taken a keen interest in work being done in the garden and picking out worms. She also likes peanuts that fall from the feeders. Then she started taking titbits away in her beak. Then she brought her baby to be fed on the spot. And within a few days, the youngster was feeding on her own.

Other than that excitement, the garden is growing fast and attracting plenty of visitors, despite the rain.

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