

FATHER HOYAL WRITES

Interveni, Creator Spiritus!

In 2007 our theme for Lent was *Led by the Spirit*.

Sunday morning sermons were related to the gospel readings of the day, and covered the topics *Spirit & Power*, *Spirit & Society*, *Spirit & Suffering*, *Spirit & Family* and *Spirit & Destiny* – somewhat difficult titles which your clergy tackled adroitly.

The well attended Tuesday evening presentations, some by guest speakers, others from All Saints clergy, addressed a variety of subjects, among them *The Holy Spirit and Jesus* (Fr Paul), *The Holy Spirit – the Unknown God?* (the late Fr John Bradley), *The Holy Spirit in the Church To-day* (Canon Malcolm Widdecombe) and *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (the Revd Dr Francis Miles). I recall only too painfully realising I had bitten off more than I could chew in allowing myself to speak on *The Holy Spirit and the Future*.

Overall, however, I remember Lent 2007 as a particularly successful season of teaching and discussion. But it does seem a long while ago, and I am feeling that corporately if not individually there is currently a need for us to reacquaint ourselves with the Lord who is the Spirit. Unless power is continually reapplied the kettle soon goes off the boil.

With Pentecost 2010 almost upon us (Sunday 23 May) we have a natural opportunity to retune to the “what the Spirit brings” (Galatians 5.22).

In 1966, Pope Paul VI prayed to the Holy Spirit for the success of the Ecumenical Council, Vatican II: *Renew your wonders in our day, as by a new Pentecost*. And what a bold and exciting thing to pray for: a new Pentecost - nothing less than, here

and now for us, that extraordinary world-changing manifestation of the Spirit's presence and power that was experienced by the apostles at the first Christian Pentecost.

History is still weighing up the merits of Vatican II, but regardless of the eventual verdict, there can be no doubting our constant need to be renewed and replenished by the Spirit of God.

Physics tells us that the universe is characterised by a thermodynamic quantity called entropy which is essentially a measure of disorder. It appears that, rather like the untidiness of a teenager's bedroom, in the absence of intervention from outside the system the universe's overall degree of disorder is always increasing. It requires little energy and ingenuity to shatter a glass, but a huge amount of both to return it to its former state.

This entropy situation comes as a surprise to people, for surely cosmic evolution has resulted in ever more ordered pockets of brilliantly ordered systems as for example in a healthy human brain? This is true, but these remarkable local gains are purchased at the expense of increasing disorder throughout the universe overall.

To my mind the renewing and energizing Spirit of Pentecost - who is of course one with the Creator Spirit constantly at work from the beginning of time - is, so to speak, the great spiritual "entropy-slayer", bringing order out of chaos, meaning out of confusion, life out of deadness, holiness out of what is otherwise a spiritual vacuum or worse.

"Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth." That is our cry, echoing the Psalmist (cf Ps 104.30). Or again, "Make me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit

within me... O God make clean our hearts within us; and take not thy Holy Spirit from us” (Ps 51.12,13).

I believe we need to keep thinking big about the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. As Trinitarian Christians we cannot afford to let the Holy Spirit be relegated to a subsidiary position relative to Father and Son – one reason why it is so valuable that the Western Church follows the Feast of Pentecost with Trinity Sunday.

And in the light of observations above I urge us to cry earnestly not just “Veni, Creator Spiritus!” but “*Interveni*, Creator Spiritus!” We need him, not just to come, to be here, but to *intervene*, and dramatically redress supernaturally our natural slide into spiritual disorder. Never mind talk of *The Holy Spirit and the Future*; without the Holy Spirit there *is* no future, for us or All Saints or any church.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Hoyle". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered on a light-colored rectangular background.

FINANCE UPDATE FROM THE TREASURER

Thank you to everyone who responded to my article in the March magazine. Not only verbal feedback but we have gained 1 new ‘pledged’ giver and an increase from 2 existing members. This is very encouraging. Thank you to all.

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in April, I presented the accounts and gave a report of the parish finances for 2009.

Overall the position is that our expenses have exceeded our income by £2,682 and we have again had to use funds from our general reserve to meet the deficit. More significantly, in addition to this shortfall, we were unable to meet our Bristol Diocesan Parish Share by £13,000.00 (paid £54,000 total requested £67,000.00). An observation from the floor at the APCM was noted that whilst the Parish had not met the full share, All Saints makes a major contribution by providing, at no cost to the Diocese, housing for our Parish Priest who cares for 3 parishes.

Tax reclaimed from Pledged and Gift Aid giving continues to be a major source of income. In 2009 this amounted to £18,000.00. Unfortunately from April 2011 the percentage we can claim will reduce from 22% to 20%. When using a white Gift Aid envelope **please** complete with your name and address otherwise we cannot recover the tax!

Thanks were expressed to the churchwardens for their diligence and almost daily attention to managing the heating system. £3,000.00 had been saved against the heating bill for 2008 despite an increase in the unit cost of gas.

The overall picture of our giving and commitment to missions and other charities is good news and shows our commitment to the wider needs of those close and far.

Lent, Harvest, Christmas, Christian Aid, Uganda and other appeals totalled almost £6,000.00. As a Parish we also commit 5% of our income to charity and in 2009 this amounted to £4,300.00. The PCC will decide which charities this money will support at their next meeting. Many thanks to everyone for their continued generosity and endeavours to look beyond our day to day expenses.

Art at All Saints also made a significant contribution to our income during 2009. Regular Matinee Concerts and of course the Summer Opera Picnic raised £4,432. The proceeds were equally shared between the Organ Fund and the general day to day running cost of maintaining All Saints to continue its presence in the community as a focus of worship.

We are very grateful to all who organise these regular events and for their enthusiasm and commitment.

We are almost 6 months into 2010 and need to keep a very careful watch on our income and expenditure as we continue to sustain All Saints as a living and welcoming place of worship in the parish and beyond. We also need to consider individually and collectively how we meet the challenge of paying our 2010 Parish Share in full.

£67,000.00 and – don't forget the heating when October comes round!!

Norman Drewett – PCC Treasurer.

Maundy Thursday sermon preached by Fr Hoyal at All Saints 1.4.10

People were often critical of the company Jesus kept. What would they make of his companions this evening, all but one destined for apostolic stardom?

Quite a few are from Galilee; hardly a social recommendation. That Simon Peter, for example, and his fisherman friends. Very upfront, with plenty to say for himself, Peter; but famous for speaking first and thinking afterwards – and for bottling out when those people in the courtyard recognize him as a friend

of Jesus at the trial. Always the same pattern. First bombastic bluster, then embarrassment all round. No modern conclave would think of electing *him* pope. Far too unreliable.

And those two boys of Zebedee, who hang out with Peter - James and John. Lively lads, but too keen to be top dogs with Jesus when he makes it. As for using their mother to ask him for favoured status on their behalf... How supine, how contemptible. And they could be vengeful, like the time when they asked Jesus about teaching opponents a lesson by making it rain fire from heaven upon them. They didn't get their nickname "Sons of Thunder" for nothing. And some people have said things about young John's relationship with the Lord.

Peter's brother Andrew is a decent chap with practical sense, good at linking people up with Jesus. But why is he content to live in his brother's shadow? Why doesn't he show more independence and leadership?

As for Matthew, everyone knows he was a tax collector for the Roman authorities. Nothing short of a collaborator in the eyes of fellow Jews. Who could trust him, let alone like him? People like him are dirt. That's what their fellow-countrymen think, at any rate.

Philip? A friend of Andrew's, it appears. And, again, not a bad sort, so far as any one can tell. But he too can fail to get the point. What about his naïve, "Master, show us the Father, and we shall be content?" He's been with Jesus all that while, but Jesus still has to spell it out, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." He may not be the brightest button on the jacket, so it seems.

And that Nathaniel - Bartholomew, if you prefer his Greek name – he's a bit like Peter, but in reverse. One moment he's all reserve and disdain with Jesus – “Can anything good come from Nazareth” indeed! The next, he's all over Jesus with extravagant adulation on the flimsiest of evidence: “You're the Son of God, you're the king of Israel” – just because Jesus said he saw him under the fig-tree with Philip! Hardly someone with a sense of proportion, that Nathaniel.

Thomas is interesting. Certainly a loyal type, if prone to gloominess – not unlike our present prime minister, perhaps. “Let us also go with him that we may die with him.” Noble, possibly, but not exactly cheery. Not what you'd want from your vicar. And it's not clear Thomas believes things when and how he should. That at least might commend him to Anglicans. But would we be safe with his mood swings, and his stubbornness?

Some of those companions hardly make their mark at all. What did James the son of Alphaeus ever do, for instance? No wonder they call him James the Less. Can he really deserve his place in the team, I wonder? Jude the Obscure is just that – heaven knows where he came from and what he does, except he's almost certainly not the author of the Epistle of Jude. And the confusion surrounding him doesn't inspire confidence. Is he, or is he not, one and the same person as Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus also mentioned in the New Testament lists of the apostles? But at least he has a speaking part in the gospels, asking Jesus quite a sensible question in John 14.22.

That's more than you can say for Simon the Cananaean, also known as Simon the Zealot. Either they call him the zealot because he's a religious hothead; or he's been a member of the Jewish terrorist group known as the zealots. Either way, he

might not be the best advertisement for what Jesus is all about. I don't think he'd ever have got through a Bishop's Advisory Panel to ordination, any more than most of the others.

And what do you say about Judas Iscariot, the one they later said was a thief, who handed him over to the authorities? I'll leave others to give you views about him. But for whatever reasons, he proves disastrous, doesn't he?

And there's Jesus, washing the feet of all that lot, urging them to love one another as he has loved them. And when he breaks bread and offers the cup, it seems that even Judas is among those who receive. Perhaps Jesus died to save even Judas?

But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. Every church, every congregation, every group of Christians is inevitably a pretty mixed bag, because that's how it is with human beings.

And as history shows, and our being here tonight proves it, with Jesus's friendship they turned out to pretty effective it spreading the word when the time came- even Judas, in a paradoxical way. And what other group of twelve men from ancient times do you know the names of?

But why so? Because the Lord chose them and loved them. Because he washed them clean, not so much with water, more with his saving blood. Because he shared his life with them, even before he died, by giving them his body and his blood. And because, having been so close to him, at least they wanted to love one another as he loved them. Not easy, that. But worth having a go at if the Lord asks you. And I think he has.

STOPGAP SAINT: May14th

FEW institutions are named after Saint Matthias, but for a decade and more I was a departmental head in one such, for intending teachers. Each year we would have a 'do' at either the Cathedral or Redcliffe, where, amid much musical multi-tasking, I got to hear many a sermon from invited preachers. Most were too predictably about Education, but I recall one from Joseph Fison, then Bishop of Salisbury, that was actually about Matthias. He dubbed him the patron saint of stopgaps, even citing the passage [Psalm 106] where Yahweh would have destroyed his people, "had not Moses his chosen *stood before him in the gap*;" adding a topical reference to the supposedly caretaker pope John XXIII, whose declared and achieved aim was to "open a window."

But let's go back a bit. The New Testament contains four straightforward lists of the apostles [Matthew 10; Mark 3; Luke 6; Acts 1]. Not surprisingly they begin with Peter and end with Judas. Indeed, for the last of these lists Judas is the main concern, and with good reason! He is dead. There is a gap.

Peter surely had a 'thing' about Judas. Nerdy exercise if you like, but you can count eight gospel narratives about Judas, and sure enough you will find Peter's name shortly before or after. Peter now is adamant. It shall not be enough to sing "Eleven for the 11 who went to heaven." The twelveness must be restored. The number clearly meant something to the Lord, who even linked it to the 12 tribes of Israel.

So, an election. The procedure has a familiar ring: first the job description, then a shortlist of two, then the appointment. True, the casting of lots raises our eyebrows, but it was established practice and, crucially, preceded by a prayer. This prayer is worth a moment's pause, for it has the very shape we recognise as a Collect.

(a) Thou, Lord, (b) who knowest the hearts of all men: (c) show which of these two thou hast chosen; (d) that he may *take the place* in this ministry and apostleship.”

Back one last time. That job description. The candidate must be one who had been on the scene since John the Baptist’s time and so, with the eleven, could witness to the Resurrection. In the now tired language of the early 20th century, he could testify to the identity of the ‘Jesus of History’ and the ‘Christ of Faith.’ (Did anyone think Philip Pullman was the first to thresh around about this?) This is the identity affirmed in one breath in II Timothy ii 8 – “Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, risen from the dead, according to my gospel.”

So the lots were cast, and Matthias it was. No going back now!
Sancte Matthia, locum tenens, ora pro
nobis.

Ken Smith

TIME AND ETERNITY

**Easter 3 sermon preached by Fr Paul Spilsbury at All Saints 18
April 2010**

You can hardly have avoided hearing that there is a new Doctor Who, even if you never watch the programme. Just over two weeks ago- on Holy Saturday- the new Doctor crash landed in the garden of a seven year old girl called Amelia. After promising her a trip in the TARDIS he leaves, saying he will be back in five minutes. Amelia packs her teddy bear, puts on a warm coat and woolly hat, goes out

into the garden, sits on her little case, and waits. And waits. And waits.

TWELVE YEARS LATER the Doctor returns, having slightly miscalculated the time. After saving the world (for the millionth time) he departs again for a “short run”. This time it is TWO years before he returns. Amelia (now grown-up Amy) is beginning to get annoyed.

Time passes. It is three years since I stood in this pulpit and preached about this Gospel, and I bet none of you remembers a word I said. Let me remind you. I wondered how the Apostles were getting on, two weeks after Easter. They had been given a message by the women on Easter morning to return to Galilee, where they would see the Lord. A week later, they were still in Jerusalem, trying to sort out Thomas’s difficulties. I speculated that Peter had decided that there was no question of leaving while Thomas refused to come. But as soon as Jesus himself had compassionately removed Thomas’s doubts, they must have set out for the north, probably to Peter’s house in Capernaum. And there, it seems, they stuck. Jesus had promised that he would be back, but he had not said precisely where, or precisely when. All they could do was wait.

How long, precisely, we are not told: but when Peter says “I’m going fishing”, he sounds as if he means, “I’m fed up with doing nothing.” So seven of them set out in Peter’s boat, and at dawn (when they have caught nothing) they hear a shout from the shore. It was probably still too dark to see who it was, but they follow the advice to cast the net, and lo and behold! A great catch! John suddenly realises that it is the Lord, Peter jumps into the lake, and they all have breakfast.

Waiting for God. Is not that what human life is? God never seems to be in a hurry. The Old Testament records many promises of salvation, of the coming of a Messiah, but thousands of years went

by before the earliest ones were fulfilled. When the Messiah finally came, he was not exactly ready to start work on the spot: he came as a baby, and thirty more years passed before he began his ministry, with three more years wandering up and down Palestine before being killed.

Strictly speaking, his saving mission was complete at the moment he passed through the gate of death, but he made his friends suffer a good forty hours of grief before returning to them. Again, strictly speaking, he ascended and sent the Spirit as soon as he rose on Easter Day, but he still waited forty and fifty days before manifesting those realities to his disciples. And despite his promise to return “soon”, nearly two thousand years have gone by and we are *still* waiting. Why?

Part of the trouble is that (quite naturally and understandably) we tend to measure time by our own life-span. Children find waiting far harder than adults do, because a week is so much longer to a child than to a grown-up. And the modern world is particularly prone to rush, to want things at once, yesterday preferably.

God’s timing seems to be geared to our need for preparation or assimilation of what, from his point of view, is timeless and eternal. Thirty years of hidden life, because that is the human scale- the Messiah was to be a mature man, not a child prodigy. Three years of ministry, so that those he gathered round him could really get to know him, in such a way that when they met him again in his new existence they could be certain it really was him. Thirty-six hours of grief, to convince them that he was really dead, followed by forty days to convince them that he was really alive. Human beings *need* time to absorb, to digest. God makes us wait, because what we rush we do badly, or do not appreciate.

On the seventh day, God rested: that is a poetic way of expressing the fact that God’s creative work has a goal, a state of fulfilment.

God is “I am who am”, while we are “becomers”, not yet what we will be. To us, our life-story sometimes seems like that of the two tramps in Samuel Becket’s play who are waiting, not for God, but for the mysterious Godot. In each of the two acts, they stooze about, while nothing much happens. Will he come, or won’t he? At the close of each act, a boy appears with a message: “Mr Godot is sorry that he has not come today, but he will certainly come tomorrow.”

After the lakeside breakfast, Jesus gently questioned Peter about his love (his love, mind, not his faith). The Lord asks us the same question: “Do you love me?” He knows that we are weak, that we fail to trust him as we should, that we often cannot vouch for our confidence, our faith. But we ought to know whether or not we *love* the Lord. Questions about our faith are, in a way, questions about ourselves, whether *we* are prepared to trust. Questions about our love are actually questions about him: is *he* lovable? Following Jesus is not just a matter of the head, of logical calculation. It is even more a matter of the heart, a desire to be close to him. Does his apparent absence pain us? Is the waiting irksome? I don’t know whether absence makes the heart grow fonder, but the absence of someone we love can reveal to us how much we love them.

Waiting for Godot- is that what our life is about? I’m not so sure. “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again”- but when? Are we waiting for God, or is he waiting for us, waiting for our love to grow more perfect?