

Fr Hoyal Writes

HOLY IS AS HOLY DOES

All Saints-tide is about holiness, the holiness that, often, even very ordinary Christians can achieve if they hang on to the Lord amid the pressures and distractions that life throws up.

We hang on, of course, by seeking to be faithful in public worship and private prayer, by seeing we are nourished by the overflowing spiritual riches that well up from the scriptures, by trying not to be too self-indulgent and by working at that difficult command of Jesus that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.

All Saints Clifton provides abundant opportunity for worship both in the quiet daily round of Mass and Offices, and in the celebrations on Sundays and holy days.

Those who struggle to keep up their personal prayer life might find it helps to join the one or two who come for Morning or Evening Prayer (8 am and 6 pm) when they can.

As our visitors' book testifies, there is a prayerfulness about our church that many find remarkably conducive to private devotion. Attending Morning and Evening Prayer from time to time (if not more often) can be a fine schooling into a habit of prayerfulness that helps us pray privately too.

I am always glad that a number of our congregation regularly use Bible reading notes or have their own personal Bible reading schemes. It remains my prayer that we shall find the right format to enable parish Bible groups to take off and flourish among us.

In this connection we may have something to learn from churches that offer weekly or fortnightly home groups where people can read

and discuss and pray together. The right kind of group can be a stimulus to commitment and fellowship. I do hope we can make progress in this direction, because – who knows? – a great deal could spring from such initiatives.

I don't often talk about what is happening in Easton, but I would like to mention the ecumenical Prayer for Easton group which meets one evening a month at different churches (and occasionally other venues) in the area.

It was started six or seven years ago by Penny, a member of the Bristol Christian Fellowship church, with a friend of her, Louise, from Trinity Tabernacle church.

The Easton area has many challenges, and Penny felt a strong call to pray for Easton and encourage others to join her.

It started very small, four or five meeting in a small room at Easton Community Centre. With All Hallows so near, I was happy to attend when I could. As it continued to meet, there would typically be one or two Anglicans, one or two perhaps from other mainstream denominations (eg Methodist, URC, Roman Catholic, Baptist), and one or two from local Pentecostal churches, Black churches and Independent chapels. There would often be one or two of the clergy.

Humanly speaking, it was the founders' Christian vision for Easton and their faithful persistence that kept us going despite modest numbers and the particular people present often being very different each time. And Penny took the trouble to attend services and special events from time to time at all the Easton churches (including All Hallows).

Growth came when the group started meeting at Easton Christian Family Centre (as the C of E parish covering Stapleton Road west/Old Market is called). ECFC is of Evangelical tradition and has

strong links with the immediate community. Sometimes there might be a dozen at the meeting, another time 30 or more.

We decided that the group ought to meet at different local churches, so sometimes it goes to All Hallows, sometimes to Fr Richard McKay's church (St Nicholas of Tolentino RC), St Mark's Road Baptist Church, Stapleton Road Chapel, among others.

The typical worship style is not tailor-made for high Anglicans with Radio 3 tendencies, but the sincerity and commitment of those who attend outweighs this minor challenge. Over the months and years a fellowship has developed which is both solidly Christian and is marked by strong common concern for the needs of Easton people and a desire to reach out towards them. There is a lot of supportive prayer for the individual member churches and various local outreach projects. It is often individuals who attend Prayer for Easton who are prominent in a number of local initiatives.

Some, for example, are involved in the Prayer Patrol that goes round the more troubled parts of Easton and St Paul's in the evening – this group has developed a remarkable community ministry to people on the streets at night.

For some time Prayer for Easton has focused on The Wild Goose project in St Paul's as it has sought to purchase and renovate the former Queen Victoria PH in Stapleton Road, to provide Crisis Ministries UK with much better premises to care for people sleeping rough and others also needing warmth and a good meal. Fifteen months ago the development project had barely £15. It has now raised nearly half a million pounds, and the new centre will open at the end of November. The group has met at Stapleton Chapel nearby to focus on the project. For similar reasons it has also met at the Methodist run day-centre in Midland Road (off Old Market) that does comparable work.

St Mark's Baptist Church has done considerable pastoral work with students and staff at the impressive City Academy school (Russell Town Avenue) and is now funding a part-time youth work to go in on a regular basis. Not long ago, the group met at the Academy, helping all of us to see how more churches could be involved in schools work. In this connection it is worth mentioning that Jessica Smith, lay minister at All Hallows as well as one of our All Saints parish readers, goes in weekly to Bannerman Road School in All Hallows parish – where almost all pupils are black and the majority Muslim). Again, Prayer for Easton has wanted to provide prayer support.

The group has recognised that it is often agnostic British-background teachers who are wary of Christian initiatives in schools with large proportions of Muslims. This is paradoxical, since the parents are often profoundly religious and are likely to be respectful toward Christians who witness to belief in God and the things of the Spirit.

The group does not neglect difficult situations. A Somali youth was murdered in the Stapleton Road area earlier this year (in All Hallows parish) in a confrontation with local youths of Caribbean background. The group's response was to fix the next meeting at Kensington Baptist Chapel just over the road from the crime scene, so that prayer could be more effectively concentrated on the needs of the area. Doing so certainly concentrated minds and hearts.

So much of what is being done in the Easton area is being underpinned by Prayer for Easton's commitment in prayer and pastoral outreach to the community. Despite recent national press stories about Stapleton Road being the most dangerous street in Britain (an assertion which is unlikely to be true despite local problems) Prayer for Easton recognises that there is a lot of community spirit in the area. Prayer for Easton itself contributes significantly to this. Looking back, Penny and Louise could be forgiven for being amazed.

Does this seem a long way from All Saints-tide? I hope not. The holiness that makes people saints (often despite themselves and entirely unbeknown to them) is prayer-powered holiness that comes from encounter with the living God we meet in Scripture and Sacrament and Christian fellowship as we seek to care, not just for the needs of church members, but for the greater community we are part of. Working prayerfully with fellow Christians of different traditions and denominations can be part of this, as Prayer for Easton is showing.

Do we need Prayer for Clifton (or Redland or Cotham)? Could Churches Together in our area be transformed, perhaps? Dare we pray that our celebration of All Saints-tide will spur us into an altogether higher league of prayerfulness and community commitment? Are we prepared to risk practical holiness?

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard Hoyle". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

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REMEMBRANCE DAY / ARMISTICE DAY

Our annual open-air ecumenical service at Whiteladies Road war memorial (St John's Church/auction rooms) is **10.50 am Thursday 11 November**. Support welcome. Remembrance Sunday service here is **10.45 am 14 November**. This year we have British legion support and four schools are sending representation: Clifton College, Clifton High School, St John's Worrall Road and Redland Green School.

"CHRISTIANS IN SCIENCE"

8.00 pm Friday 19 November in Parish Room.

Prof John Bryant of Exeter University on: "**Synthetic Life?**
A look at the claims made about 'Synthia', the new synthetic cell, and its possible uses and misuses."

Refreshments provided. Suggested donation towards costs £2.

NEXT CONCERT MATINEE

4-5 pm Saturday 20 November (NB).

Organ Recital by Richard Johnson (Westbury on Trym) making a popular return. Many will remember his remarkable tour de force playing various organ and piano rhapsodies at an earlier Concert Matinee.

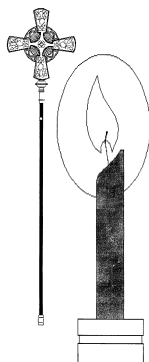
Admission free, retiring collection, tea and cake after.

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ALL SAINTS PARISH RETREAT 2011

5 pm Friday 18 February – 4 pm Sunday 20 February at Abbey House, Glastonbury. Retreat conductor: Fr Thomas Seville CR. Please give your name to Liz Badman (Parish Office). A splendid opportunity for rest and refreshment.

ALL SAINTS with ST JOHN, CLIFTON

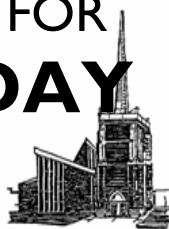


**“FROM
DARKNESS
TO
LIGHT”**

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE OF
MUSIC AND READINGS FOR
ADVENT SUNDAY

6.00 PM 28 NOVEMBER

All most welcome



Sermon Preached by Fr Hoyal at Solemn Mass on Bible Sunday 24 October 2010 (Fr James' last service as honorary assistant priest)

Fr James was ordained deacon in 1999. At the service Bishop Michael Houghton asked him (among other important doctrinal and pastoral questions): Do you accept the holy Scriptures as revealing all things necessary for eternal salvation in Jesus Christ? And Fr James answered: I do so accept them. Bishop Michael duly ordained James, and he received his stole of office as a deacon. Bishop Michael went on to give Fr James a copy of the New Testament, saying: Receive this book, as a sign of the authority given you this day to speak God's word to his people. Build them up in his truth and serve them in his name. Very fitting; preaching the word is a major part of the deacon's office.

If Fr James had replied No to the Bishop's question, the ordination could not have gone ahead. Happily, he didn't.

A year later, in 2000, when Bishop John Richardson ordained Fr James to the priesthood, before proceeding he too asked the same question about the Scriptures as Bishop Michael had. No doubt Fr James was duly anointed with the holy Chrism and given a chalice and patten as symbols of his priestly office. But this time the bishop gave him a copy of the whole Bible. An important point was being reemphasized. And, again, Fr James's Yes to the bishop's question was crucial to his being ordained.

That is because the Bible is crucial. Never think that the Bible is just an interesting collection of dusty old books that you and I can pick and choose from ad lib according to mood and proclivity, just taking the bits we like, but ignoring the bits we find dull or difficult or challenging or even offensive. No, it is

not an optional resource book or reference work that we can consult or disregard, entirely as we feel.

On the contrary. Bible and Church are as one. It was the Church, in the sense of Israel – God’s people of old, who, in God’s providence, created the Old Testament scriptures that point to and prepare for the coming of the Saviour. In the light of his coming the emerging Christian Church, again by God’s providence, created the New Testament scriptures that testify with unique authority and power to Christ and the Gospel and the Church. In no way did the Church repudiate the older scriptures. On the contrary they were for ever referring to them and appealing to them for instruction and guidance and inspiration.

That’s why, for example, in the Second Letter to Timothy it says that the holy scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It goes on to say that all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness - a truth that applies to New Testament no less than Old, of course. We’re told that Timothy, as a Church leader, is exhorted to base his faith on the scriptures he has come to know so well.

So overall, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is the Church that makes the Bible and guides us to interpret it wisely. But equally, you might say, the Bible - once made - makes the Church. It is our spiritual rudder; it guides us. It is our spiritual anchor; it anchors us to the authentic witness and experience and understanding of the first Christian generations. The Bible without the Church has no context, it is neutered of any authority. The Church without the Bible has no security, no reliable guidance, no sure authority for her faith.

Of course, we have our individual views, and we are where we are in our personal faith journeys, and this is our entitlement in good conscience. I can cope with that, and the Church of England can, no problem.

But as part of the Church catholic and apostolic, we worship “the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, professing the faith uniquely revealed in the holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds,” and to my mind this position is not negotiable. Indeed both when Fr James became a deacon, and when he was ordained priest, he had to give his personal assent to this understanding as an official representative leader and servant of the Lord’s people in the sacred ministry, and I am sure he was happy to do so.

As the faithful people of God, *you* need to be fed with Christ the Bread of Life. So you need to know that the priest who stands at the altar has the faith, and the competence, and the authority, to lead God’s people in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, so that there is no doubt that Christ is truly present with us in the sacrament of his body and blood, to heal and renew.

Equally, as the faithful people of God, *you* need to be nourished and inspired by Christ the Word of Life. You need to know that the priest who stands at the pulpit has the faith, and the competence, and the authority, to guide God’s people in knowledge and understanding of the holy Scriptures, so that the Christ the Word of life is authentically preached and made present to us in our hearts and minds, to encourage and to illuminate.

I am most fortunate ... to be married to Muriel. I am also *most* fortunate to be surrounded by a veritable constellation of faithful, good priests who serve with distinction both at the altar

and in the pulpit, as well as in their pastoral ministries. They are priests who understand profoundly that an authentic church needs an authentic ministry of word and sacrament if it is to be reliable and effective. How fortunate we all are.

But to-day we fix on one particular star in our heavens, one who to-day leaves us to shine in another part of the firmament. While we congratulate him on his splendid promotion, we can't but be sad at his leaving us after eleven years' good and faithful service to us here.

People will miss you, Father James, not just because we like you a lot and you've given us so much through your wonderfully warm friendship, all your generosity and care, your clear mind and lively wit, and the sheer fun of having you among us. We value all this and more, yes.

But we shall miss you most, Father, because you yourself - someone we have all grown very fond of - have been authentic for us as a faithful minister of word and sacrament, at the altar, in the pulpit, and wherever you have gone among us in your care for us as priest in the Church of God. I shall certainly thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Father, as St Paul says somewhere. And I know I shan't be alone. So thank you, Father, thank you very much. We are grateful.

No one has ever clapped after a sermon of mine, Father, but they will to-day, not for the preacher, of course, but in deepest gratitude and affection for His Honour the Revd Judge Patrick, or - as we know him - our very dear Father James.

Sermon preached by Fr James Patrick, Harvest Festival 2010

Just what exactly do you think you're doing? Just what exactly do you think that we're doing? For those of us who gather here most Sundays, it is all so familiar to us. The rhythm of the mass, the words of the liturgy. Most of it, we can say without recourse to the books. But with the familiar, it's sometimes a good thing just to stop and try to look afresh at the familiar and see what it is that we are doing.

Moses encourages the Jews to do the same thing in the first reading when they come into the promised land. They are still some way from the promised land, but he is telling them what to do when they get there. When they cease to be a wandering people, when they have stability and land, and crops, they are to take some of the first fruits and offer it to God. But they are to do so using particular words, words which recall their heritage as children of Jacob, the wandering Aramean, their exile, and tribulations, but above all the works of God. So they are to take the first fruits, they are to offer it to God, they are to give thanks to him, using a form of words recalling all that God has done for them in history.

We do the same. Obviously, we take the first fruits, or the best that we have from the Harvest at harvest time, and we commemorate that today, giving thanks for God's bounty. But we do that only once a year. Yet every day in this church, and especially on the first day of the week, we take the best that we have, in the form of our worship. We are offering it to God. And we give thanks to him, using a form or words recalling all that God has done for us in history.

Many of you know that this building and I are about the same age, and so it's obvious that I am a product of my generation, a generation formed in liturgy which was influenced by the Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII. Those reforms introduced many changes. The liturgy was simplified. The vestments were simpler. You've probably heard of the priest addressing a group of clergy: "Fathers," he said. "We have moved from an era of gin, back-biting and lace, to an era of gin, back-biting and box pleats." I much prefer box pleats and I'm not a great fan of yards of lace. It feels very odd now to be the one who is old-fashioned. Most significant of all, perhaps, was the moving of the altar, away from the wall where the priest had stood for centuries facing East, to the westward position which we have here at this altar. It reminds us that we are the people of God, gathered at his table, with the priest in the person of Christ, *in persona Christi*, being fed with the Body of Christ, just as he told us to on that first Maundy Thursday.

Now I'm very much a product of that generation. And I love the idea that we are a family gathered at a meal: that we clear the air, we listen to the old stories, then someone lays the table, says an elaborate grace, and we sit down to eat. But there is a danger, and it was Bishop Andrew in his excellent book *Heaven and Earth in little space* who made it clear to me. The danger of that, is that we make too much of Maundy Thursday and not enough of Good Friday. What do I mean by that? By concentrating on being the family gathered at the table, we look out at one another as the body of Christ. However, when mass is celebrated facing Eastwards, then we are still the body of Christ, still doing what the Lord commanded us to do, but we stand then together at the foot of the cross. For, whenever mass is celebrated, we do no more than plead the sacrifice of Christ. We do no more than re-enact that one perfect oblation, and join in that perpetual offering of himself for our salvation. The great Italian baroque churches make that point so well. Huge stone altars with screens and elaborate tabernacles surmounted with an impressive cross on it. It seems to me that a new reform introduced

by Pope Benedict tries to avert that danger. You might have noticed, if you watched any of the papal masses when he was here a fortnight ago, that when he faces west at mass, he does so with a cross before his eyes. It partly obstructs the view the congregation has of him, but so what. Of course, we should use our eyes, of course we want to see what's going on, but what is going on is more important than the identity of the minister of the sacrament. The celebration of the mass is more important than which priest is saying it. It is the food which endures for eternal life.

When we offer the sacrifice of the mass, we use a special prayer. Ours doesn't speak of a wandering Aremean, but what it does speak of is Jesus, and what he did that at the Lord's supper, and then, in the words of the prayer that we will use today, we remember his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross; we proclaim his mighty resurrection, and glorious ascension. That great saving action. So if you like, the prayer reminds us that we commemorate, and re-enact, and participate in both Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We are both at that table with the Lord, and at his feet on Calvary.

At harvest time, we celebrate the wonder of creation, that small seed that, with warmth, water and light, grows into something so different; that process which feeds and sustains us. At the Mass, we celebrate the wonder of the incarnation: that God became man -- one man - who died, but rose again, who feeds us and brings us life.

Today, at this harvest mass, just what exactly do you think you -- and we -- are doing?

Sermon preached by Fr James 17.10.10

I've hesitated whether to start like this, but I've decided that I'm going to. It'll sound grand and pompous, but this is my last 11

o'clock sermon, and so you'll have to put up with it. You probably know that I started my new job on Friday, which meant that on Thursday I was sworn in as a circuit judge at the Law Courts in London. The judge who swore me in was in a suit, but the new judge is expected to turn up wearing every single bell and whistle that's ever been thought of, and some others besides.

I have to tell you that you do feel faintly ridiculous. But the most ridiculous spectacle was just as I'd started to get changed. I'd managed to fasten around my neck something that looked like a doily, before pulling on the tights. If you ever see a judge in a long wig, with buckled shoes, you might admire the sight of the finished article. But believe me, having glimpsed myself in a mirror, don't be tempted to see the process. It turned out that I wasn't very good at getting dressed. Everything was pretty much where it should be, but my aunt and my mother both took the view that my legs reminded them of Nora Batty (see Fig. 1).

Appearances matter. My old grandmother would never come downstairs without first applying make-up. Was it vanity? Or was it as she explained it, that it was only polite, so as not to scare the horses? The outward physical sign. What she looked like mattered to her.

It must have mattered to Naaman too: a man held in high regard: a commander: someone who was rich, who would have travelled with a retinue; someone who was from another country, and who had vanquished the Israelites. Just think what it would have meant to him to be disfigured by leprosy. And being from another country he would have worshipped his own god. There was nothing international about gods then. Each nation or tribe would have its own belief structures, its own traditions, its own gods. But Naaman was persuaded to see Elisha. And then by his own people, to wash seven times, in a process which healed him. His flesh was restored so it was like that of a young boy.



Fig. 1. His Honour the Rev'd James Patrick sporting tights.

Last week, prompted by some of the Italian churches I visited in the summer, I spoke a little about the positioning of the priest in relation to the altar, and how that can affect what we think we are doing. Facing the crucifix, we can concentrate on Good Friday, and forget the Last Supper. Gathered as a family at the table, we can forget that we plead the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. There was something else I noticed in those baroque churches. Although of course the originals have not gone, and are often there by the door indicating the start of the Christian's pilgrimage, there are other fonts in those churches. Now all right, you're right of course: there is only one baptism, once, and so there should only be one font. This thing though, in church after church, was a bit of a monster: white, octagonal, and about 6 feet across, with plenty of space for lots of water. It seems that the Italian fashion of the moment is a fuller immersion of infants than we have been used to. Next week, Isobel will be baptised in our font at the 11 o'clock mass. But she will be sprinkled. She won't be dunked in a river, still less one of these octagonal fonts. She'll just have some water poured over her head. Now of course, the difference does not matter. Each is as valid as the next. But, as you know, I like big symbols, and there is something about immersion which is so impressive. In our first reading, the wizened and diseased skin of the aged military commander became like the flesh of a young boy. In baptism, exactly the same happens to us. But not our outward selves. Not that bit where appearances matter to others. Inside us. Within our very being, we are cleansed. Whatever we have been before, in that dunking, not seven times, but three in the name of our Trinitarian God, is cast aside, and replaced with the soul of a young child.

Naaman's response to his cleansing is to return to Elisha and to thank him. A few weeks ago, Fr Brendan spoke -- for me movingly -- of the irritation of the Church of England mucking about with the lectionary as if it knew better. It's done it again. The Roman Catholics and the Methodists have a slightly different reading.

Theirs continues with a rather touching part about how Naaman then asked for soil. Remember how we were thinking about national gods. Naaman wanted some soil so that he could worship the God of Israel in a foreign land. Taking some soil with him, some soil from the land of the Jews, he could worship the Jewish God wherever he was. Whilst he had understood something of the nature of God, he still hadn't understood that the God of Israel was a God without boundaries, without limits.

The gospel reading is also about lepers. It's also about healing. It's also about thanks. Yet we see that ten were healed, and only one returned to thank Jesus, and he was a Samaritan.

The transformation that we have undergone, frankly, is more extraordinary than the eleven lepers we think about this morning. Our souls have been washed by water and the spirit. We have been made worthy to approach Jesus, and to feast with him, and to feast on him. By our baptism we achieve the means of salvation. Through confirmation, we are sealed with his spirit. Through communion, we are fed on our journey towards salvation. That in itself is more miraculous than anything that happened to any leper. And if their reaction is gratitude, what should ours be? Never mind our outward appearances, we have been made like young children. The proper response is that about which Paul speaks. If we have died with Christ, we will live with him. If we endure, we will reign with him. If we deny him, then he will also deny us. He though is faithful. This Lord who works wonders and miracles. The Lord who isn't constrained by national boundaries. The Lord who calls us each day and each minute of each day, again and again to him to live in love. That Lord is faithful.

Are you? Or is it all about appearances?