

Your rector's letter

Dear friends,

A silent retreat

When I told people that I managed to book my annual last July, I received different reactions: 'Good for you!' 'I wish I could join you' 'You should do this more often' 'Do you have time to spend 3 days in a monastery?' Let me try to explain why a retreat at least once a year is vital not just for a priest but for all Christians.

I am just back from three days silence in a Trappist monastery. The program of a silent retreat is very basic: praying, reading, walking, eating and sleeping. So I took my walking boots and a few books with me. Everything except the services in church is in complete silence. Even at meals we keep quiet. I generally enjoy chatting, however I experience silence as most refreshing.

Nevertheless, at a silent retreat words buzz through my head. And the only listener during this time of silence is God. Or it may be me who, finally when I leave the treadmill and stop rushing around, start listening to God. This last retreat felt like finding a love letter that your spouse or partner wrote to you many years ago. It was like re-living that moment you had made a commitment to love and to cherish. I felt tremendously grateful for the hope, purpose, meaning and goal that God's Son gave me and all humanity by dying on a cross and by rising from the dead. I experienced God's love in the bare silence of a 10 square meter bedroom and it brought me to tears of joy in the big church during communion.

During the retreat days I saw things in another perspective. When I left Wivenhoe on my way to the monastery I had taken with me a mental list of open issues and concerns. The first night I couldn't sleep well as I thought of the transformation project and everything it involves. I also thought of the wedding couples, the baptism families, the bereaved, our congregation, the sick and the housebound, our beautiful team of volunteers and many others. I prayed that the efforts of many at St Mary's would only be for God's glory and not for personal praise. Humility, it's called, and that's hard work, especially for me. This was my last thought before I fell asleep that first night. A few hours later at night vigil psalm 131 was read; the words reflected my prayers when I couldn't sleep. If you have a Bible to hand, you could read the psalm and make it your prayer for today.

Don't take yourself too seriously

This is the title of a talk to which I warmly invite you. The speaker is renowned church cartoonist Dave Walker who is well known for his cartoons in Church Times and calendars. Dave will show us several of his best cartoons

illustrating the funny side of church life. Are you in for a laugh? If so, put Thursday 20 September at 7.30pm in your diary. It is a free evening – there will be a retiring collection at the door for the transformation project appeal (after expenses).

Dr Joan Taylor with new evidence for Jesus' female disciples

Another date for your diary: on Friday 28 September at 7.30pm we welcome Dr Joan Taylor, professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism at King's College London, for a talk about her research on Jesus' female disciples. Together with Dr Helen Bond from the University of Edinburgh she found new evidence for the significant role female disciples played in Jesus' entourage. Dr Taylor's talk promises to question and widen our views and will be a discussion item for long among members of the Christian community. You may remember Dr Taylor's previous talks 'What is the Bible?' in 2011 and 'Jesus and Brian' in 2015. She is a brilliant speaker. Don't miss it. It's free with a retiring collection for St Mary's church.

A cup of coffee for the annexe and transformed church

People in church asked me to give updates about the transformation project appeal more often. This shows a great interest in the project. Therefore I intend to keep you updated once a month at the Sunday morning service. You may also like to subscribe to the e-newsletter with a monthly update about the appeal.

As your priest I have no information about who has given to St Mary's appeal. This is important to know. However the general figure of the public response is known and tells us that already half of St Mary's electoral roll and possibly a third of all Tidings readers gave their support. To those who are wondering how they can help, I'd like to give this advice: if you wish, you could consider donating a small contribution every month instead of a large lump sum just once. There is a special leaflet in church that explains how to donate on a monthly basis.

A fervent coffee-lover told me that he'll donate weekly the equivalent of the price for a regular coffee in a coffee shop (1.95 GBP). This makes 8 GBP monthly. If all church members would do this, this would make a total amount of 29,120 GBP by the end of the term for the appeal (31 December 2021) and nearly 35,000 GBP if gift aided. 'Really?' you may think. It is true that we often underestimate the impact of our giving as we wrongly think it may not make any difference. Give it some thought; it shouldn't stop you enjoying a delicious cup of coffee (or tea).

May God bless you.

Erwin