

Crossing the Threshold

A Vigil of Prayer
29 May – 12 June



Diocese of
Leicester
Shaped by God

Crossing the Threshold Introduction

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This year we mark another major milestone in the life of our Diocese, as we give thanks for the restoration and re-opening of Launde Abbey and as we open St Martins House. Both projects have involved many people and much generosity, so we need to give thanks to God for blessings and provision way beyond ordinary 'daily bread'.

We are inviting as many individuals and communities as possible to pray during this vigil, particularly for the Mission of the Diocese expressed through parish churches, sector and pioneer ministries, public engagement, worship, pastoral care and proclamation and experienced in particular focussed ways at Launde, St Martins House, St Philip's Centre and in the Cathedral. The Crossing the Threshold opening events at Launde and St Martins House provide the 'bookends' to this vigil of prayer leading us to Pentecost.

Each day at 12noon prayers will be offered and we invite you to join with us at that time in the cathedral or in your context at that time. Please also use the regular opportunities for prayer in your churches, fellowship and study groups etc to particularly pray for the Diocese. Please also consider creating additional specific times for prayer during the vigil period. Since many communities gather for Ascension Day, we encourage you to pray especially for the Diocese that day.

We have included a simple order or framework for prayer which you may wish to use and each day there are prayers and reflections written by a wide range of people from across the diocese which we hope will be a resource and a springboard to nourish and deepen our praying. We have kept the calendar of saints days and festivals and used one of the bible readings set in the Church of England lectionary.

This text is also available on the website, by clicking on the Crossing the Threshold button at www.leicester.anglican.org/crossingthethreshold

The poet priest George Herbert vividly wrote of prayer as 'the churches banquet', 'heart in pilgrimage', 'heaven in ordinarie', 'the souls bloud', and 'something understood'. In other words, it is a gift and it is just what Christians do naturally because we need and love God, we need and love each other and we long for God's kingdom to come. We find ourselves in very different contexts within county and city and yet we are profoundly connected in Christ and through our common membership of the Church of England in Leicestershire. Our mission and ministry will strengthen and deepen further as we choose to pray for one another.

Crossing the Threshold Prayers

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Those who wait for God shall renew their strength

They shall mount up with wings like eagles;

They shall run and not be weary

They shall walk and not faint.

Holy God, you call us together

To reflect on your Word and our life in your world.

Be with us now as we pray together,

That we may hear your voice and understand your way.

This we pray through Jesus, the Christ. **Amen**

Psalm 133 (from the translation, The Message)

1 How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!

2 It's like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard,

Flowing down Aaron's beard, flowing down the collar of his priestly robes.

3 It's like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion.

Yes, that's where God commands the blessing, ordains eternal life.

Glory to God; creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen

Scripture Reading

The reading appointed for the day is used. This ending may be included

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church

Thanks be to God

Please read the daily reflections then keep some silence

The Prayers

Thanksgiving

We give you our praise and thanks, O Holy God for all the gifts of love we have received and for our life together in Jesus Christ.

We especially give thanks for the generosity and care which have led to the restoration of Launde Abbey and the opening of St Martins House.

We give thanks for the blessings of generosity and care which we have enjoyed down the years in this place.

Give us thankful hearts and inspire us to generous service.

Intercession

We give thanks O Christ that you crossed the threshold of heaven to give us new life through your cross and resurrection. We ask you to send the Holy Spirit to renew, inspire and heal the church.

We thank you for our life in Christ and for our partnership in the Diocese of Leicester. We pray for both lay and ordained people who share in the leadership of the church across Leicestershire.

We pray especially for Tim and Christopher, our bishops;
Vivienne, our Dean;

David and Richard, our Archdeacons,
and Jonathan, our Diocesan Secretary.

We pray for the ministry of the St Philip's Centre, Leicester Cathedral,
and especially at this time for Launde Abbey and St Martins House:

Launde Abbey Prayer

Father, here may the faithful find
salvation and the careless be awakened;
Here may the doubting find faith
and the anxious be encouraged;
Here may the tempted find help
and the sorrowful comfort;
Here may the weary find rest
and the strong be renewed;
Here may the aged find consolation
and the young be inspired;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

St Martins House Prayer

Lord God,
St Martin found his purpose by meeting
the needs of a beggar
and in doing so, met you.
We pray for St Martins House and all
who work there,
that it may be a place of generous
and transforming love,
serving the people
of this city and county.
In the name of Christ who offers a
welcome to all. **Amen**

Other prayers of concern may follow

With Jesus, we pray together

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Sending Out

A candle is lit and a bowl of salt is held

Matthew 5:13-15

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Each person is invited to receive a pinch of salt on the palm of their hand with these words ‘You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world’. Please respond ‘Amen’ and then taste the salt.

Eternal God,

you call us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where to go,

But only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Eric Milner-White

We proclaim not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord

And ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake

For the God who said ‘let light shine out of darkness’

Has caused the light to shine within us

To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God

In the face of Jesus Christ.

Let us bless the Lord

Thanks be to God

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Sunday 29 May Easter 6 Abiding in God: John 14:15-21

Dr Angela Jaegger, Reader at St James the Greater, Leicester reflects...

There is a story about the thirteenth century Florentine painter Giotto, who brought in revolutionary techniques in the creation of depth in painting. The pope of the day wanted to discover who the best painter was, who might decorate his chapel. So he sent out messengers to look for examples of technical excellence rather in the way that artistic and architectural competitions are held nowadays. One of the messengers came to Giotto's studio where he found him surrounded by examples of his work.

'Will you give me something, he asked, 'to carry to the Pope to show him your skill?'

Rather than offering a beautifully finished painting, Giotto took up a piece of card, and with one sweep of his arm drew an absolutely perfect circle.

The astonished messenger returned with the card and the story. To his surprise the Pope turned from all the magnificent pictures other artists had submitted, and said, 'The man who drew this circle shall be the man who will decorate my chapel.' And so 'Giotto's O' became a proverb for a little thing perfectly done.

There is something about human beings that longs for perfection and yet is acutely aware of the gap between the ideal we hope for and the reality that actually pertains. Christ said, 'if you love me you will keep my commandments' and yet we fall short. Christian faith sees this as a living 'between the times.' We have caught a glimpse of perfection in Christ but the kingdom of heaven has not yet come.

Yet the heart of the gospel is the promise that we may be transformed. Eastern Orthodox Christianity has traditionally expressed this as the idea that God became human so that we might become divine, in the sense that we may in some mysterious way through grace participate in the life of God. This is the radical promise of Jesus: 'you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.'

But this is not simply an inner transformation, but one which involves the outer transformation of the world. The love we receive from abiding in God will naturally lead to acts of love towards others. Faced with the gap between the perfect world of ideals and the realities which we face every day we need to realise the importance of simply getting on with the simple, with loving those who we are drawn into everyday contact with. Each of these may be 'little things' but it is these that together may be a means of transformation of the churches and communities that make up our Diocese of Leicester.

*Almighty God, you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you;
so lead us by your Spirit
that in this life we may live to your glory
and in the life to come enjoy you for ever;
through Jesus Christ our Lord
who is alive with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever. Amen.*

St Augustine of Hippo

Bishop Tim Stevens, Bishop of Leicester reflects...

“Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.” The words are familiar to millions and still sung by crowds at the FA Cup Finals. The hymn touches hearts at funerals and on great occasions. It echoes the words of St Luke’s Gospel in the story of the disciples walking with Jesus, unrecognised, on the road to Emmaus. Just as Jesus is about to leave them, they urge him to stay with them, saying: “Stay with us because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” Jesus stays, breaks bread and their eyes are opened to recognise him.

The same word in the original Greek is used in this passage in which Jesus assures his disciples that the Holy Spirit will stay with them and that He will be in them.

God puts down roots with us. He does not abandon us. His intention is to make His home in us if we will allow Him to. The means by which we become the dwelling place of God is through a life of prayer. This is the process by which we become opened up to God, ever more aware of His presence, ever more alert to His prompting.

That is why this vigil of prayer surrounds the two great celebrations of Launde Abbey and St Martins House over the course of the next two weeks. We pray that God will abide in us and that through us He will make His home in Launde Abbey and in St Martins House. Both of these places speak of different ways in which God inhabits our lives.

Launde Abbey speaks of the rhythm of withdrawal and retreat – the quiet place where God can speak to us in the silence and inhabit the deepest recesses of our souls. In contrast, St Martins House, at the heart of a busy city, speaks of the way God dwells with us in our reaching out to others with the Gospel in practical acts of neighbourliness and service.

In the Greek the word for “abide” has the same root as the word “Immanuel” – God with us. We pray that God will make His home in these two places as well as in all

of us who come to Him in prayer, and that others will feel at home in them because they sense that they are in the company of those who know something of God's love.

*I need thy presence every passing hour;
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me. Amen.*

**Monday 30 May: Josephine Butler, The re-opening of Launde Abbey
John 15:26-16:4 Resourcing for service**

Revd Tim Blewett, Warden of Launde Abbey reflects....

'You have been with me from the beginning'.

So often we have a sense of time passing by in our lives, a time which goes marching on whatever we do. But then there are also moments in our lives which because of their significance seem to allow us to step outside of that time in to a different space and a different understanding. These two 'types' of time are known as 'Chronos' time which is 'tick tock' time and 'Chairos' time which is 'significant moment' time.

All of our experiences are lived out in 'Chronos' time – with us reliving the past through our memory or wondering what our future might behold by our imagination. Our memories and our imagination can come to control us if we are not careful to the point that we stop living in the moment – the now that Christ is constantly beckoning us into. So for instance if you can imagine a plank of wood being placed before you on the ground you will willingly walk along it but if that same plank of wood is placed a hundred feet above the ground you won't. Now that the wood is up in the air your imagination takes over and you become scared of what might happen in your future – you imagine yourself falling from it. The same thing can happen with our memories as well as we can allow them to stifle and hinder us just as we can allow our future to control us. But this is to miss the point that we can only ever live in the now – our memories are exactly that – memories – while our futures have not yet happened.

If only we can learn to live in the present – in the now – then we can start to realise the truly significant in our lives and step into those Chairos moments. That is what many people find at Launde – they step into a sanctuary of sacred space where through a significant moment they are resourced to serve God in a new way. This can also happen in other places to if they and we are rooted in prayer. But it is, as T. S. Eliot wrote in his 'Four Quartets':

But to apprehend

*The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint –
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.*

It is in that Kairos time – that significant moment – that we come near to understanding the Incarnation and are resourced for service.

Mrs Pam Howe, Reader at St Philip's Evington reflects...

Following Jesus cannot be a half-hearted affair! Opposition, being ostracized, even death at the hands of a hostile world must be expected. That was Jesus' stark warning to those who were contemplating following Him. At the time when the Gospel of John was first read, Christians were indeed facing intense persecution. They needed powerful resources to enable them to stand firm in their faith, loyal to Christ, as they faced an uncertain future.

In this short section from Jesus' teaching at the last supper, He promises the Holy Spirit, the "Counsellor", to resource the disciples for the struggle which inevitably lay ahead. The Father's Spirit within the disciples will bear witness to Jesus and in their turn, the disciples, who have become close to Jesus, strengthened by that Spirit, will become powerful witnesses of their Lord in a hostile world. Through the Spirit, Jesus can be with them always. Through His words, Jesus resources them for what lies ahead: the loneliness of expulsion from Jewish community life centred on the synagogues and the threat of death from religious leaders who falsely believe that they are doing God's work. They will come to remember Jesus' prophetic words.

In today's complex world, where injustice, conflict and despair are on every hand, what can we little people do - to quote a favourite writer? How can we bear witness to our Lord effectively in these times of increasing hostility to religious faith? Only, I believe, by allowing the Holy Spirit to drive us out of our comfort zones in service

to Christ and to extend our humanity. We need the courage to stand out, to be different, to champion justice and peace by supporting organizations within and beyond the diocese dedicated to these ends. We remember today Josephine Butler, a passionate Christian of the Nineteenth Century. At great cost to herself, she forsook a life of wealth and privilege to fight effectively for justice for women, for slaves, for child prostitutes and for others in great need.

Today we give thanks for Launde, our very own powerhouse, a peaceful place in a glorious setting. There we can escape for a time from the frenzy of daily life to pause, to sort out our priorities, to seek God's presence in the quietness of prayer. There we can "be strengthened in our being with power through His Spirit". Eph 3:16

*O God, let my whole being be directed to you,
that through your Holy Spirit, you may be the God of compassion and love
to me and through me. Amen* Gerard W. Hughes SJ

Tuesday 31 May: The Visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth Luke 1:39-49 Encounter

Revd Alison Fuller, St Peter's Highfields, Leicester reflects...

Mary and Elizabeth are met; both women of the covenant, old and new. They know the exquisitely unexpected new life burgeoning within each of them. Surprise and fear; awe and wonder; solidarity in their encounter.

John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ are wriggling within their swollen bellies. Greeting one another, the prophet and the messiah. God has entrusted their young lives to these strong and beautiful women of faith, our forebears.

As we reflect on their mysterious encounter what emotions arise within us? How does God greet us in the face of family or friend or stranger? What are we being called to offer of our lives in the service of God's reign?

In my new parish of St Peter's Highfields I have encountered many strong and beautiful women of faith, mainly African Caribbean women, mothers and grandmothers, who have endured much pain and hostility and yet have remained faithful to God and the Church. They remind me of my own mother and her pioneering spirit which led her as a young woman from a small island into war-torn Europe.

Let us remember all women who are with child at this time; for their partners, families and communities; that the children they bear may know the reassurance

and acceptance of God's love shining through the love and attentiveness of those who nurture them.

Let us also remember those whose families are divided or torn by any kind of dysfunction or conflict that we may guided as a Diocese and within our faith communities to offer spaces of sanctuary and care.

Let us remember our own mothers and grandmothers with thankful hearts.

*Living and mysterious God,
we give you thanks for the witness of Mary and Elizabeth, our forebears in the faith.
May we, like them, say yes to your invitation to magnify your name
that the poor may be lifted up and the mighty humbled.
Strengthen us in this Diocese and through these holy places of encounter:
Launde Abbey and St Martin's House,
that we may bearers of your truth and love to a hungry world.
We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Canon Dr John Hall, Director of the St Philip's Centre and Diocesan Director of Inter Faith issues reflects...

We don't only encounter some of our favourite Biblical and Jewish characters in the Bible. For many people, it often comes as a surprise that the Blessed Virgin Mary is highly regarded in Islam as well as in Christianity. And it is a further surprise that her cousin Elizabeth, whilst not mentioned by name in the Qur'an, though her husband Zechariah is frequently mentioned, is equally revered in Islam as a wise, pious and believing woman who became mother to John the Baptist (or Yahya as he is called in Islam). Together, Zechariah, Elizabeth and John are recorded in the Qur'an as being humble and faithful servants of God, John himself becoming the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus, also highly regarded in Islam. So isn't the question we should ask ourselves this? - Are Muslims as well as Christians right to think of encountering God as the same God, for didn't the same Elizabeth and the same Mary we both hold in common, experience the good news of God acting in their lives in ways we can both, as Muslims or Christians understand? Through inter faith encounter with each other and in our study of each others scriptures, cannot we agree to hold these characters in common in holy regard and high respect? Yes, we know that our faith story differs in our understanding of Jesus, but those roots from which the Jesus story grows are common and precious to us both.

So often when we encounter another faith, we focus on what separates and divides us, no more so than when we think about Islam. The images of Islam we see in the media are frequently negative, and our response along with the general population is not surprisingly one of fear and apprehension. But surely this story of Elizabeth and Mary is one that we can celebrate together. It is also a personal story of how

fear and apprehension are overcome by the intervention of a godly message of good news. Elizabeth, the one who was faithful, but suffered because she was so long without a child, has finally been blessed by God. Mary is told by Elizabeth that she too will be blessed and so will the child she is to bear. And this is where the paths between Islam and Christianity significantly diverge – around the person and works of Jesus, for he is the one whom Christians believe is coming, not just as a prophet as in Islam, but as Saviour of all. But then, as we hold Jesus especially dear, let us remember that in our interfaith encounter we still hold so much more in common than that which divides.

*Lord God, we thank you for the people we know and love,
the people who are part of our faith story like Elizabeth and Mary.
Help us, like them, to be faithful and open to your loving purposes.
As we live out our lives in the complex world of many faiths,
help us in our encounter to seek the common ground
in our shared stories that we may live in peace and for the common good.
Grant this we pray in Jesus name. Amen.*

Wednesday 1 June Justin Martyr John 16: 12-15 Study and Education

Canon Professor David Wilson, Lay Chair of Diocesan Synod reflects...

Our passage points us to the wonderful truth that the Holy Spirit enables us to see Jesus. We are not at a disadvantage. Jesus has not left us alone. He is with us by his Spirit, drawing us into fellowship with himself. He gives us a deep-down security that comes from knowing that we are children of God because we have been adopted in his family through his death on the cross for us.

Justin Martyr knew this for himself. He studied philosophy as a young man, was converted to Christianity and ultimately settled in Rome as a Christian teacher. He was martyred in Rome under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius when Junius Rusticus was prefect of the city (between 162 and 168). His Christian faith was at the heart of all that he taught in an environment that was frequently far from hospitable to the gospel of Christ. He was unashamed to stand up for Christ when the going was tough. There is much we can learn from his focus on teaching the faith and from his steadfastness under pressure. Following Christ today is far from problem-free but the Holy Spirit Jesus talked about in our Bible passage provides us with resources to grow and develop as Christians if only we are prepared to draw upon them.

Education is a political “hot potato” with the focus on “free schools” and student tuition fees. Widening participation and access to all resonate with the justice and equity which Christ regularly spoke about and yet elitism is far from absent in the contemporary scene. A good education – in the widest sense of the word – is a vital

ingredient of a healthy democratic society but we need to beware lest it becomes an end in itself. It should always be a means to an end, namely developing self, producing rounded individuals able to play a part in shaping society. For Christians, this focuses on the values Jesus emphasised in his “new society”. In other words, education should always be a means to an end not an end in itself. Education, vital though it is, can all too easily become a false messiah.

Jesus showed himself to be one of the best kinds of teachers – those who encourage their pupils to think things out for themselves and learn through their own responses. He told stories; perhaps we need to be prepared to relate our faith in this way, drawing on the strength of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in John 16: 15: “the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you”. What a wonderful truth to sustain us throughout our lives.

*Almighty God, you are the source of truth and your Spirit leads us in the truth:
May all who teach and all who learn in our schools, colleges and universities
Be set free from everything that might hinder their search for the truth;
And finding truth, may they learn to use it for the good of all people
and for your greater glory. Amen*

James M Todd

Revd Dr Stuart Burns, Head of School of Ministry reflects...

Justin Martyr was born in Palestine but was a Greek by both his education and his upbringing.

He was a philosopher, who, after studying the teachings of a wide range of Greek philosophers turned to Christianity. He is thought of as the first Christian philosopher, teaching at Ephesus and Rome, where he opened a Christian school, training and developing believers to appreciate, and engage in debate with other worldviews.

Justin lived out what he taught, and frequently engaged in public debates, often wearing his traditional philosopher’s cloak as a sign of his authority to do so. His understanding of the Christian faith was that it did not involve a rejection of the philosophical disciplines, rather he gathered all his previous learning and used it in both defending and explaining the gospel. He saw Christianity as ‘the only sure and worthy philosophy’- the culmination of all that had gone before. In many ways, Justin lived out today’s scripture reading – in that he spoke and taught to glorify the Father, declaring truth, and speaking not on his own, but through that which had been revealed to him by the Spirit of truth.

Justin’s main aim was to explain the Christian faith and doctrine in a manner that was accessible to everyone. In an age of superstition and myth Justin clarified Christian teaching on the devil and demons, and emphasized the liberating power

of God at work through the Holy Spirit. He was probably the first Christian writer after the Apostle Paul to grasp and teach that the Gospel was available and applicable to all peoples. He was particularly keen to explain Christian worship in the face of misunderstandings – he dealt with accusations of immorality and cannibalism at communion (love one another / this is my body).

Justin was beheaded, in the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 185 AD, to whom he confessed his faith after refusing to offer a sacrifice to the emperor's gods to save his own life.

Through Justin we are reminded of the need to explain the gospel, and to engage with others. Through our passage today, we are reminded that this call is not for a select few, or those that can 'wear the philosophers cloak' but for all of us as followers of Christ. We are reminded that this task is not undertaken in our own strength, but in the power of the Spirit, not to glorify ourselves, but to glorify God.

Almighty God

may we, who know you and love you, also speak of you.

As we speak of you, may we speak of your truth,

having the grace to listen and engage,

the courage to explain and to challenge,

and the inspiration of your Spirit,

to direct and inspire.

To the glory of your name. Amen

Thursday 2 April Ascension Day Luke 24:44-end Worship

Emily Walker, resident musician at Launde Abbey reflects...

'Then he opened their minds...'

To reach the high places in our worship, we have to have our minds opened, to let go of what we thought was important to us, and to wait, as the disciples were instructed, 'until you have been clothed with power from on high'. This is an extraordinary journey, and, for me, enabled most powerfully through music and song. In my previous work as a music therapist, a young woman whom I saw weekly insisted that in every session we had to sing 'Kum ba yah'. All of us approach every moment as a person shaped by what has come before, and, after the seventh or eighth week of singing this song, she began to add more verses: 'Someone's angry Lord', 'Someone's crying Lord', 'Someone's singing Lord'. We are all this 'someone', and we all know or know of 'someone', asking for God to 'Come by here', alongside us. And the young woman, who had a limited number of words with which to communicate, reached profound depths through this, and so much more music, through silence, through sound, through the long process of waiting for us to truly connect to the heart of who she is and how she has been shaped by her history.

People have been singing in worship throughout all of history, to express joy, lament, sorrow, injustice, protest, love, hope, prayer. Music can move people into a different place, can open our minds, can open our hearts to the waiting and attentiveness we need to discern God's voice, God's song. In a recent service of Taizé prayer in the chapel at Launde, I found that people wanted to stay, to sing, to wait, for two hours, and would have waited more ... from the words of Jesus, 'My peace I leave you, my peace I give you, trouble not your hearts', through prayer and silence and into singing 'In God alone my soul can find rest and peace, in God my peace and joy'.

The journey that the disciples took, with Christ, moved through all of these things: joy, lament, sorrow, injustice, protest, love, hope, prayer, and out to Bethany where they saw him ascend, 'carried up into heaven'. They had opened their minds, listened, waited, and let go, and then 'worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy'. But this was, by no means, the end.

*Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
into the house and gate of Heaven, to enter into that gate
and dwell in that house, where there shall be
no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears or hopes, but one equal possession;
no ends or beginnings, but one equal eternity,
in the habitations of thy glory and dominion,
world without end. Amen*

John Donne

The Very Revd Vivienne Faull, Dean of Leicester reflects...

Stay here in the city

Putting the light on first thing in the morning can be disorientating: it takes a while for eyes to adjust, and in the meantime we stumble around.

The resurrection appearances of Jesus have an early morning feeling to them: things aren't clear, everything seems surprising and perplexing. The resurrection is like a light going, on giving a new way of seeing everything. It was Jesus who the disciples were aware of in a world which now seemed new and perplexing. It was Jesus who was the focus of their attention.

But after a while there were no more reports of seeing him. The light had ceased to be something that drew attention, it was something to see by. The Ascension is the moment when Jesus goes away: he stops being the focus of attention. But he simultaneously becomes more deeply and permanently present. He is with us as

the light we see by: and so we see the world in a whole new way.

And that new way meant the disciples were newly attentive to their context. Jesus had said the good news was to be proclaimed 'beginning from Jerusalem', and the disciples were told to 'stay in the city' to await the coming of the spirit. From then on the group which had been peripatetic began to settle and to commit themselves to the people and to the places of the city. From that point, to the end of the Book of Revelation, it would be the city (rather than the garden, as identified in Genesis) which would be at the heart of the proclamation of Jesus' rule.

We have ambivalent feelings about cities: they are places of creativity and energy and wealth. They are also places of risk and poverty and harm. Many people have moved out of our own city of Leicester to find places in the suburbs and countryside where they feel their families will flourish. Nearly ten years ago we had a debate as a Diocese about whether to move our Diocesan offices from the city to a greenfield site. We decided to keep them in the city. A decade on that meant we could refurbish St Martins House as a place where the rule of Christ in the city might better be discovered and proclaimed for the 21st century, and where we too may be empowered from on high.

*Risen and Ascended Lord
by the light of your presence
and the power of the Spirit
may we see your world with your eyes
and through our words and work
proclaim your justice and your peace. Amen*

Friday 3 June Martyrs of Uganda John 16:20-23 Worldwide Mission

Revd Alison Booker, Curate at Countesthorpe reflects...

Birth. It's a messy subject and not one we're necessarily over fond of talking about. Yet scripture is full of images which reflect the special moment of birthing.

This passage is no different, here Jesus speaks to his disciples about the way things will be, this is not a narrow or specific vision, this is Jesus talking about 'big picture stuff!' Here we have an image of the children of God who weep and mourn who experience pain such as the pain of childbirth. Jesus holds an image before his friends of pain that is inevitable, pain that will not last but most importantly pain from which there is a birthing, a beginning.

There are many places in the world where God's church feels very much the inevitability of this pain, places where individuals have sacrificed their lives as martyrs for the faith, there is a question for us about what is birthed out of that? What faith is birthed in us through the inspiration of others? Where is the pain

for us? How can we take seriously the idea that from pain will come joy without inadvertently justifying the pain as good in itself?

I wonder if there is something very important about holding in tension the very clear pain and mourning now with the promise of joy later but also holding that lightly so that we are not tempted to focus only on what is to come in the heavenly realm as the only place where joy is to be found.

To use the image Jesus chooses of a mother giving birth to a child there is indeed pain in that process and remarkably (in my experience) that pain is instantly gone as the child is born, however, the longer experience of birthing and motherhood brings with it many, many ongoing moments of pain and joy which are intermingled and so it seems does our discipleship there will certainly be individual journeys of pain and joy, there are moments of great pain and joy within the body of the church herself and so today as we reflect upon this we might ask ourselves where am I in that journey? Where is my own church? Where is the church in our land? And where is God's church worldwide?

*God of all compassion,
Be our companion in the pain
Bring to birth in us your promised joy
Give us eyes to see the journey
In your worldwide church we pray
That you will lead us through pain to joy
That we may see your face now and always. Amen*

Bishop Christopher Boyle, Assistant Bishop of Leicester reflects...

The question fell like a lead balloon. I wished I hadn't asked. The Revd. Andrew Meshach of the parish of Kia, bordering Kilimanjaro International Airport kept his head bowed. It wasn't a bad question. "How much does your parish pay you each month?" He had received his stipend of £22 for only two months of the past year. Since entering his house, little more than a shack with walls papered with newspaper, I had been showered with the most generous hospitality. He and his family in giving me the warmest of welcomes had crossed the threshold of hardship. Andrew is one of the forty two clergy of the Diocese of Mount Kilimanjaro who with the Diocese of Kiteto is linked with us in a bond of Christian friendship.

Today we remember the Ugandan Martyrs, young men and boys from the king's court who had embraced the Christian faith so whole heartedly that they accepted their deaths in 1886 with trust and peace and joy. Their witness was so powerful that it was the spark that ignited the flame of Christianity in that part of Africa. Their faith had been fed among others, by a missionary, Bishop James Harrington, who was also martyred and is honoured by a memorial not far from Andrew Meshach's parish.

Suffering and joy. Can they really be so close to each other? In today's Gospel reading Jesus speaks to his disciples most solemnly of the grief and weeping that lie ahead for them as he foretells his own death. And to add to their distress at the same time he says, others will rejoice. But they are to take courage and Jesus gives them that wonderful image of the suffering and joy of childbirth. The joy that will follow their grief no one can ever take from them. It is the joy that filled the hearts of the young Ugandan men who went to their deaths singing and dancing. It is the joy with which Andrew Meshach and his family welcomed me, a brother in Christ from Leicester, into their home.

There is so much anguish and despair in the world, so much suffering how can we not give ourselves totally to sharing the message of Jesus that changes suffering to joy?

*Majestic and gracious God,
More awesome than the agents of war,
More powerful than the wrath of nations,
Restrain the violence of the peoples
And draw the despised of the earth
Into the joyful life of your kingdom,
Where you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen*

Saturday 4 June Petroc John 16:23-28 Retreat

Canon Barry Naylor, Urban Canon and city-centre parish priest reflects...

The risen Christ is in our midst – abiding in us and we in him. We are baptised into Christ and he promised that those who partake of his flesh and blood would abide in him and he in them. We can experience this reality of his presence in many different ways – in the Scriptures, in our prayers, listening to music, admiring a work of art or a beautiful view, rejoicing with one we love, or in a time of silent encounter. A Carthusian monk wrote that it is, above all “in the stillness and creativeness of silence that we encounter God”

Jesus was constantly aware of the presence of his Father, his whole life witnessed to this. He did, however, withdraw from the crowd, to have time alone. Each and every one of us can profit by following his example, especially in lives that are often filled with a host of other things and a general busyness. Quality time alone with God, is vital to our Christian spiritual wellbeing; it's not just for the holy few, the great saints, like Petroc, whom we commemorate today.

Time spent alone with God helps give a particular perspective to our lives – be that some time each day, a block of a few hours once a month or a few days retreat

on a regular basis. Some of the greatest saints, who withdrew from the world to spend time alone with God found themselves radiating a holiness and spiritual attractiveness that drew many to come and visit them for their wisdom and insight. One such example today is Jim Cotter, priest and writer, to whom many travel to visit in Harlech. Such people are not escaping from the world but seeking to be involved in God's world at the deepest and most significant level – the depths of prayer.

Such time can allow us to develop a godly, Christ-like perspective on our own lives, including our prayer lives –through this perspective it becomes clearer what we should ask of him, as we pray “in his name” and how we can co-operate in the building of his Kingdom, doing his will. True prayer is about us listening to God intently identifying with the divine will, and then seeking to live lives that reveal our prayer to be an encounter with the deepest and most sublime of all realities – with the living God.

Be still for the presence of the Lord is moving in this place. Amen

Revd Paskal Clement, Assistant Priest, St Peter's Oadby reflects...

Reflecting on this passage made me think that one of the many astonishing and stimulating characteristics of Jesus' personality is his utter sense of reality. He spoke plainly and clearly to crowds, religious leaders, to the political powers. And now to his disciples, Jesus warns them about his departure and about his coming death. At this moment how the 'world will rejoice', they will weep and mourn. They will be sad. Have you ever noticed in your life what sadness does to us: it convinces us that there is no light at the end of the tunnel? Jesus assures his disciples that their weeping and mourning will be short lived – 'a little while'. For lasting joy would be theirs. When will this joyful transformation take place? Is it when the disciples will see the resurrected Lord or at the arrival of the Spirit as Paraclete? Or this could mean the joy at his final coming on the last date at the end of all things. Of course this joy will take place, disciples and believers will experience it.

While Jesus is speaking with his disciples about his painful hours ahead, he is equally aware of their emotional fragility. Jesus is a realist and true. Sometimes we people of 'faith' try to deny our sickness, pain, suffering and sadness, believing that to admit to them is a negative confession and an obstacle to faith. But Jesus' farewell discourse indicates that he was neither pessimist nor negative but real. True faith is realistic.

In the passage Jesus encourages his disciples to ask in his name. So far they have never asked anything. They did not feel the need of this because everything was provided to them by Jesus. They were not in want. The time has come when

they need to ask. Asking means as they have trusted Jesus they must trust the Father. Asking leads into two types of communication: building relationship with the Father and listening. Entering into deep intimacy with the Father, understanding his purpose for us and asking him anything in prayer.

Loving Father, we thank you for Jesus who is a realist yet very sensitive and compassionate towards the suffering and pain of others. He leads us to express our sadness, pain, suffering and struggles in life without feeling guilty about it, as he did with his disciples – talking about his forthcoming suffering and death, yet believing in resurrection. Holy Spirit come and help us to trust the Father as Jesus has taught us to ask him anything in prayer, in Jesus' name. Amen

Sunday 5 June Sunday after Ascension Acts 1:6-14 Vocation

Terry Shepherd, PCC Treasurer at Rothley reflects...

Kingdoms everywhere teeter. Power is misused, opportunities wasted, hopes and dreams go unheard. The all-powerful omnipresent leaders ride into the buffers, Israel is still unbuilt.

Out there, beyond the clouds, the site of our longing and looking, there is the sunlit openness by day, and the amazing panoply of the space/time void by night, the endless array of the cosmos. Our little minds can dimly appreciate that the light may have already gone out of some of what we see, so great is the distance; and yet more is out there the light of which may not yet have crossed the void to us.

What does it mean to be a man or woman, fixed to our little planet, gazing out at all this immense creation? Who will help us to discover a purpose, to find significance, to live out a life in conjunction with all those other lives that teem around us?

No angels in white robes come and stand beside us. No spoken word gives authoritative direction. If only we could be free of our small-mindedness, of the baggage we have brought from our early years. Where is the power that will take our minds to a newer wider level? Where is the power that will undo the cultural chains and the hurt that has come with us from our past? Where is the power that will give our personhood its fullness of purpose?

It can come to all. The Spirit came to me as a kind of strong, fatherly hand offering to take me out to play. Although much loved at my mother's hand, I had also imbibed her destructive mantra to me 'if only he had a bit more push'. I was not OK.

But the Spirit proclaimed me as really being OK. I could actually be the more

reflective soul that I was becoming, and blossom into it. And here lay the seeds of the answers to the big questions. My calling became as the listener, the reflective, the understander; and thence the careful helper, the dependable assistant, the encourager. In the upper room of life, among all the leaders and the followers, the men and the women, the family and the kinsfolk, I rejoice at my task that they too would each feel OK.

*Heavenly Father, fill me with your Spirit
that I may know myself through and through.
Lead me into the busy upper room of life that I might be of use,
helping others to find their true selves,
the person that you intend them to be. Amen*

Canon Sue Field, Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Team Vicar, Loughborough and Nanpanton reflects...

Although Luke finishes his Gospel with the story of the ascension of Jesus, he begins his second volume with a “flashback” to some of the events between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension. We join the story at verse 6 of Chapter 1 of the Acts of the Apostles where the disciples are with the risen Jesus. They ask him, now that he has been raised from the dead, whether God is going to complete his purpose by finally establishing his rule. To this, Jesus gives two responses :- firstly, he says that the timing remains God’s secret and, secondly, that the immediate task of the disciples was to be witnesses “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The spread of God’s kingdom would take place through the disciples who would be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This was the final conversation that Jesus had with his disciples and, having witnessed the ascension, they returned to Jerusalem and joined in prayer together with the women and other brothers.

On this Sunday between the Feast of the Ascension and the Feast of Pentecost, we remember the disciples as they wait. They had been told what their task was but they had not yet been empowered to carry out that task. How daunting that must have felt for them! We can imagine that they would have felt full of their own inadequacies and weaknesses. They might well have come up with several excuses as to why someone else was much more qualified and better-suited to the task. Despite any reservations though, they remained faithful in prayer and waited, trusting that God would equip them and that, together, they would do all they could to carry out the task they had been entrusted with.

Jesus has entrusted us, his Church, to continue that same task of restoring God’s kingdom on earth and being witnesses to the saving power of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We do that as the Body of Christ in the power of the Holy

Spirit but each of us has our own particular calling, our own “song to sing” as God calls us all to particular areas of service. We will often feel wholly inadequate, unskilled and weak but as we follow God’s call we can trust that God will empower us with all that we need to fulfil that calling.

Father, I abandon myself into your hands.

Do with me whatever you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you.

I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me and all your creatures.

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul.

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart.

*For I love you Lord and so need to give myself,
surrender myself into your hands without reserve*

and with boundless confidence for you are my Father. Amen

Charles de Foucauld

Monday 6 June Ini Kopuria, Melanesian Brotherhood John 16: 29-end Mission

Revd Suresh Kumar, Assistant Anglican Chaplain at the University of Leicester, Assistant Priest Emmaus Parish Leicester reflects...

John 16:29-33 is part of the farewell speech of Jesus as recorded in the gospel according to John. Throughout the world, Christians were encouraged by these passages and drew their inspiration to their specific situations of challenging existence.

Following this passage comes the prayer of Jesus for his disciples where he is praying for unity. The Church of South India uses John 17:21 ‘That they may be one’ as the motto for the United Church.

Even though the ‘scattering of disciples’ and ‘taking courage’ is specific to the times of the fourth gospel, the experience is very true in the communities where Christianity is in its infant stage.

Among many factors that unite Christians in the world, persecution of Christians and Christians’ response to persecution stand out clearly. People in other parts of the world know about the killing of Christians in various parts of India. Many sensational stories which involve death and persecution come out quickly. But there are persecutions of Christians from very subtle corners which may not be popularly known.

During the formation of the constitution of India, people were given full freedom

to follow any religion of their choice. In another attempt to uplift the poor and low caste people, reservations were made and developmental schemes were announced for the underprivileged. These special benefits in job reservations, admissions in educational institutions (to study and work) and financial benefits were not given to Christians. For example people belonging to 'Dalit' castes will not receive any benefits from government if they are Christians.

Some Christians feel that they are being denied their basic constitutional rights and yet follow Christ carrying their cross. Some say 'Jesus is with me what else do I need'? Some take up a different path. They will have a Christian identity for their faith and will have a Hindu identity for their government benefits.

This situation is an ongoing persecution of Christians in India since its independence. The Church faces a difficult task in its mission. People when they hear the gospel and arrive at a situation when they want to convert to Christianity, do we encourage it or discourage it? When people have double identity (Hindu for the sake of the government and Christian for the sake of their faith) how do we react to such people? How do we understand the great commission in this context? How do we encourage the people who have courage and deny everything to follow Jesus as his true followers?

Loving Lord, we pray for the persecuted Christians of the world.

We pray for courage and a deeper faith.

We pray for the Church which is reaching out to the corners of the earth with your love.

Teach us the mission we need to do in a changing environment.

Help us to discern your faith without making compromises which suit us.

We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to take courage. Amen

Canon Dr Mike Harrison, Director of Mission and Ministry reflects...

On a recent trip to our link diocese of Trichy, a group of some 20+ of us spent a morning of reflection with Rev Dr. Israel Selvanayagam. At one point he asked "How do you celebrate the gospel in your context?" We spent a minute or two struggling with the question before being distracted by popular themes, the need to be more inclusive, to promote social justice and so on. We missed the question largely, perhaps because we're so accustomed not to celebrating the gospel so much as struggling to follow it, communicate it or defend it. One of the greatest challenges a number of us found on our trip was the tone of celebration, of joy and gratitude among Christians with precious little in the way of material resources or indeed status as a minority faith. And this is precisely the orientation Jesus challenges us to adopt in today's reading; "in the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world", John 16.33. Our joy is to be rooted not in the chances and changes of this unpredictable world, in the shifting sands of our moods and feelings, in the roller-coaster of career success and failure, in our

(inconsistent) performance as disciples. No, it is to be rooted in Jesus overcoming the world.

William Barclay suggests four points this passage makes about Jesus; the loneliness of Jesus, who is yet not forsaken by his Father; the forgiveness of Jesus, who yet loves those who abandon him; the sympathy of Jesus, who desires the peace of those who despair when they look back at their desertion of Jesus; the gift of Jesus, inviting the disciples to share in the joy of his overcoming of the world. Our joy is rooted in the one who offers us forgiveness even as our victim, the one we let down, the one who enables us to realise what we have been involved in and extraordinarily still invites us to go somewhere else, with him. It's an invitation to leave the land of retaliation, defensiveness and self- preservation, to sail off the coast of this invitation with breezes of joy and freedom and security, following him, beyond the horizon even of physical death. Or to change the metaphor, with Christ's resurrection in view, with this on our hearts and his name on our lips, we are not laboriously toiling uphill, but merrily coming down. Time to celebrate.

*Grant to us Almighty God
that we might ever more deeply rejoice in your Son's victory over sin and death,
and live ever more fully that resurrection life
which your Son invites us to, through the same, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen*

Tuesday 7 June John 17:1-11 Schools and Colleges

Mrs Marion Plant OBE, Principal and Chief Executive of the North Warwickshire and Hinckley College reflects...

Thousands of students come through the doors of our Colleges every day. Each one is on their own journey of learning, with their own personal set of challenges to overcome.

We meet students at the start of their journey with us; they are often full of nerves – can they achieve the qualification at the end of their course? Will they get on with their peers and make friends? How can they overcome any problems they may be facing at home? How will they cope with money worries or keep their spirits up after a demanding day at College followed immediately by a shift at work?

We are confident that with a positive attitude, clear aspirations, hard work and the right levels of support, students can have a rich and life-changing experience at College.

As staff, with an honest and real interest in each and every one of our students and their individual well being and success, we share their ups and downs.

Whether it is being the person who listens to their problems and helps them work

through the issues they face, or the person who hands them their certificate or walks past as they speak to their parents or carers about their exam results on the phone – we are with them every step of the way during their time with us.

All teachers of any kind will feel an affinity with Jesus' prayer to God as his earthly ministry draws to its end. These are his disciples, given to him by the Father. He recruited each one in stories we know well even now. And here in this reading we can overhear his thoughts and prayers about these students and friends.

What can we learn then, from the greatest teacher and the most famous students in history? We hear his pride in his 'students' and how much he treasures them. But we also see how hard it is for him to leave them, leave them to take the test alone. Our instinct following this is to teach our own students even more and teach them even better, no college principal would object to that. But perhaps we should also learn that there is a time to let go and allow them live the life we have prepared them for.

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the privilege and the impact of learning.
May we all learn from the challenges and opportunities that this new day brings.
Inspire us to use our learning to the benefit of others,
whether in the role of teacher or students.
In Jesus' name. Amen*

Canon Mary Lawson, Director of the Board of Education reflects...

This is Jesus' prayer in the final moments before being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prays for his disciples as he knew He was leaving them.

During His life on earth, He had taught them about God, not only in words, stories and parables, but also by the way He lived – power and wisdom, love and goodness and holiness and purity. Jesus had become their purpose and direction and His presence empowered them.

Jesus needed to prepare them and He prayed for protection, unity and blessing on them all, as they faced the world without His physical presence. Our schools and colleges prepare our children and young people within the mission of the Church, for their future lives. Where we 'Nourish those of faith, encourage those of other faiths and challenge those of no faith.'

We must always remember in our prayers, not only our children, but all those who work so hard to nurture, nourish, hold and educate them in vibrant, secure places of learning; where families are welcome and part of the learning process. Places of learning where the doors are always open and the paths free of obstacles and

where the Church's mission is clear for all to see.

We must pray for all our schools and our Church School Family, as they face an uncertain future. A future which is changing, in so many ways, for many, many families and our world is full of turmoil and unrest. Children and young people need to learn to respect and care for one another; to be shining examples in our communities; to walk with pride and confidence in their young lives; to pray for protection, unity and blessings on each and every child, and each and every family.

We have been commissioned to continue Jesus' mission in the world. The love and care we show the world is to mirror the love that Jesus shows us. The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love one another.

This is a passage of prayer, where Jesus is asking His Father to make us one in heart and mind. What Jesus asks can be summed up in what he says at the end; 'I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.'

A Prayer for all our Schools and Colleges

These are our schools, Let peace dwell there.

Let the rooms be full of contentment.

Let love abide there.

Love of one another,

Love of mankind, Love of life itself

And the love of God.

Let us remember, that as many hands build a house,

So many hearts build a school. Amen

Wednesday 8 June Thomas Ken John 17:11-19 Unity

Revd Mandy Ford, Area Dean of the City of Leicester, Vicar of Beaumont Leys and Priest in Charge of Stocking Farm reflects...

Today the church honours Thomas Ken, ordained in 1662, who lived through a period of upheaval in the Anglican church- through the reigns of the catholic King James II and the protestant William of Orange. Amidst turmoil and criticism from both sides, Ken clung to his faith in Jesus and his redeeming work on the cross.

Ken's view of the church shows both his faith in God and his sympathy for human nature, he wrote:

" I believe, O blessed and adorable Mediator, that the church is a society of persons, founded by thy love to sinners, united into one body of which thou art the head, initiated by baptism, nourished by the Eucharist, governed by pastors

commissioned by thee, and endowed with the power of the keys, professing the doctrine taught by thee, and delivered to the saints, and devoted to praise and to love thee.

I believe, O holy Jesus, that thy church is holy like thee its author; holy by the original design of its institution, holy by baptismal dedication, holy in all its administrations which tend to produce holiness; and though there will be always a mixture of good and bad in it in this world, yet that it has always many real saints in it; and therefore all love, all glory be to thee.” (Thomas Ken, “An Exposition on the Church Catechism” or “The Practice of Divine Love” 1685)

Archbishop Rowan Williams has pointed out that the church is the one body we belong to whose members do not choose to join, but are invited by God. He asked us to consider that those we find hardest to agree with may have been called to help us to understand God’s purpose more fully.

Today, as we reflect on a church which is still a mixture of good and bad, and still has many real saints in it, let’s consider how each member of the church is a gift of God the Father to the Son, a brother or sister in the universal family of the faithful. How can we listen more attentively to one another, work more effectively together, and so reveal the unity which is God’s will for the church?

Father we thank you for our brothers and sisters;

For the baptism that unites us

And the work of Jesus which saves us.

May we be united and sanctified in the truth

So that the world sees your love in action

And glorifies your name

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Venerable Richard Atkinson, Archdeacon of Leicester reflects...

One of the joys of my ministry was leading a large ecumenical team in Sheffield. It wasn’t just that they were gifted colleagues; or that, in contrast to many others, we used well the structures of team ministry; it certainly wasn’t a matter of uniformity of theology and style for we ranged widely over the spectrum of churchmanship – evangelical to catholic; but rather there was a unity of purpose rooted in a unity of spirit. In the tough urban environment where we ministered we discovered something of that unity that is Christ’s gift and Christ’s call.

In John 17:11 Jesus prays ‘that they may be one, as we are one’. As the disciples are commissioned for mission in the world, with all its challenges and trials, Jesus asks that they know that unity which reflects the unity of Father and Son; a unity of spirit and of purpose that is essential to true witness.

The disunity of Christians is a scandal - not because we can’t get the structures of

unity right, but because such disunity mars the face of God and impairs our mission in the world. It is a global challenge and a local challenge – not least the immediate call to a unity of spirit and purpose with the parish next door, or the benefice that shares our Mission Partnership. And what really matters is that disunity fractures the gift of common life and mutuality that our nation needs so desperately at this time of economic stringency and growing divide.

And yet unity and disunity are not merely functions of our life together in this world – for Jesus' prayer is for a oneness that transcends heaven and earth. It is a unity of spirit and purpose that overflows in praise and glory.

As we pray that our life together might reflect the oneness of the Holy Trinity we can do no better than sing fervently the doxology of Bishop Thomas Ken:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow
praise him, all creatures here below
praise him above, angelic host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

*God of Trinity,
whose Son prayed that we might be one as you are one;
create in us that unity of spirit and of purpose,
that in all that we do,
we may do it to your glory;
and be filled with your praise, Amen*

Thursday 9 June Columba John 17: 20-end Mission

Revd Dr Peter Hooper, Team Rector of the Bradgate Team and Rural Mission Officer reflects...

I wonder how many of us enjoy 'people watching', that simple harmless pastime of observing those who pass us by on the street or perhaps on some form of transport during a long journey by train or plane for instance. I'm sure all of us have done this at some point in the past and of course in this context we perhaps used clothing, gender, or someone's physical presence to make up in our own mind what sort of character a particular person may have. I believe psychologists tell us that with the rapidity of our brains we make assessment of individuals within the first three seconds of seeing someone.

Having recently had the chance to attend the 'Leading your church into growth course', I was particularly taken with the four 'P's' of mission, prayer, presence, proclamation and persuasion. We often forget how simple yet at the same time effective and meaningful our actual physical presence can be in helping to grow God's kingdom. And of course, this is exactly what Jesus is referring to in his

prayer, part of which forms this reading from John's Gospel.

We are called, indeed instructed, to be at unity with one another such that the full glory of God can be seen. Our unity as Christians should reflect the same unity as exhibited between the Son and the Father, and the Father and the Son. But of course, this where the problems arise! Such a description of unity brings into sharp focus all the issues that surround the understanding the Trinity, and with this in mind, is it any wonder that we struggle to bring forward an acceptable, a united definition, of what Christian Unity may look like.

But maybe we are starting at the wrong place with this analysis, and rather than focussing on the cause, we should instead look at the effect. A disunited Church is not only a scandal to the Gospel but a block to others to see God's glory. The wrong sort of presence is not just neutral or ineffective in terms of mission but is undoubtedly detrimental. How can we as Christians justify living in a way that might actually put people off from learning more about Jesus?

Our quest to follow Jesus' prayer is perhaps best fulfilled not with a focus to the word unity, but with an emphasis on the fact that when we are 'people watched' by others God's glory can be seen in us, perhaps even in three seconds!

Dear Lord, we pray that our way of life may reflect your greatness and glory such that when in the presence of others, your presence in us may be seen and be effective in growing your kingdom. We ask that as with Columba who we celebrate today, we too may be 'happy with the joy of the Holy Spirit' Amen

The Venerable David Newman, Archdeacon of Loughborough reflects...

Many people have had their last words recorded. My particular favourites are Oscar Wilde's – "Either that wallpaper goes, or I do" – and General John Sedgewick - "they couldn't hit an elephant at this dist..." In this section from John's gospel we have Jesus' last words to his disciples culminating in this famous prayer.

We might imagine Jesus wanting to say many things in these 'farewell discourses' and of course he does, but his final act is to pray, and to pray about their mission. He clearly has a vision of the growing church – "I pray for those who will believe in me through their message" – and is concerned that "the world may believe that you have sent me". The growth of the church and a convincing apologetic were concerns of our Lord just as they are for us today. However it is interesting how he imagines these will be achieved. For us it might be about a culturally relevant and well presented message using the latest technology; or a radical discipleship with cutting edge social programmes. I certainly don't knock either of those. Yet Jesus homes in on one theme.. unity. He prays that they may be one, that they may be brought to complete unity.

Among all the themes of mission, Jesus ends with the importance of united relationships. I wonder if we have given that the priority that he does. Furthermore it is significant that this is said not in some passionate exhortation, but in prayer, for that unity is seen as the overflow of the love of God. We are given an extraordinary glimpse of the divine life – ‘you loved me before the creation of the world’ – ‘I have made you known to them... that the love you have for me may be in them..’ Called to share in the loving unity of the Trinity we become one with our brothers and sisters in Christ and it is that unity that will lead others to faith.

Of Columba, founder of several monasteries and most famously that of Iona, it was said that “he was concerned with building up both the monastery and its life and of enabling them to be instruments of mission in a heathen land.” Prayer, unity and mission were held together in the monastic vision, and need to be for us today. Perhaps not so much famous last words..as faithful lasting love. .

*Lord God, unite us in the love that unites you, Father, Son and Spirit,
and let that love overflow through us into the world
o that it may recognize that you have sent us, even as you sent your Son.
May we recognize your calling to mission as individuals and a church
and may our words and actions interpret and reveal the love that is your essence.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

Friday 10 June Opening of St Martins House John 21:15-19 Engaging in Service

Canon Hazel Byford, Baroness Byford of Rothley reflects...

The person at the heart of this new world, “after the resurrection” story is Peter – the strong man who let Jesus down and who probably couldn’t forgive himself. But all that was to change – both for Peter, and for those who read it to-day.

John tells us that the disciples had unsuccessfully been fishing on the Sea of Tiberius. As dawn broke the following morning Jesus stood on the beach (but the disciples did not recognise him) and told them to recast their nets. The haul was huge. The disciple whom Jesus loved (John, we believe) said to Peter “It is the Lord” They breakfasted together after which Jesus challenged Peter asking him if he loved him. Three times he asked the same question; three times Peter affirmed his love. Peter could not have failed to remember that he had three times denied knowing Jesus whilst Jesus was being questioned by the High Priest. And yet it was to Peter that Jesus turned to lead his disciples as they continued his mission, to carry on his teaching, and continue his ministry of love, forgiveness and challenge. Jesus told Peter that the task of leading would be demanding and dangerous. He would not be free to come and go as he had but be taken on a journey that would lead to his death.

This story is important for us to-day. We often feel inadequate, unsure of what we are being called to do, but in choosing Peter, a failure in many people's eyes as well as his own, we realise that we too can serve the Lord. He chooses us, despite (or maybe because of) our failures and feelings of inadequacy, to take part in his mission to spread his good news. Peter's monumental calling tested him to the limit – he accepted the task – are we willing to rise to challenges coming our way?

To-day at this official opening of St Martin's House, we come together to recommit to serving our Lord, to playing our part. We remember our fellow Christians in other places in the world where discipleship can also mean danger and martyrdom; they are held in our prayers.

*Lord, as we leave this centre,
may we be renewed in our commitment to you.
Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead (James 2:17)
Here I am; send me out to carry on your mission. Amen*

Revd Pete Hobson, Director of St Martins House reflects...

Standing around a fire, getting warm, my name-sake Peter had been asked three times "Aren't you one of them?", and three times he had denied it. Standing around a fire, getting warm, Jesus now asks him three times 'Do you love me?', and three times Peter declares it. Each time, when it comes to the third time of asking, Peter almost shouts his answer: first NO – and then YES! The contrast is deliberate, obvious – and painful.

It's relatively easy to say the right thing in the right surroundings, with the right people listening. It can be very hard to speak the truth about our inner feelings when we feel people aren't sympathetic, or it would put us out into the cold. So however honest I might try to be, what I say isn't always the best measure of the person I am. What I do is. Which is, I guess, why Jesus gave that particular Peter something to do - 'Take care of my sheep'. And the doing of it, as Jesus told him, would be the ultimate test of the truth of what he said.

Today many people will be celebrating the gift that is St Martins House, and making all sorts of declarations about what we hope and intend to do with it. We'll be doing that surrounded by people who have come together for the same purpose – and it will be relatively easy to say those things with every sense of truly meaning them. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, will come the real test, when we're faced with putting those words into practice – not least for myself, as Director of the place!

But that's really no different from what faces us in every act of worship, as we leave the relative comfort zone of the like-minded, and go back into the worlds we came

from, where, if we're doing it properly, we're probably surrounded by people of all sorts of views, many of whom have little time for our 'god talk' and what they see as our 'illusions of meaning'. Over the past almost three years, as I've lived with the vision that has, in part, become St Martins House, I've continually returned to its three declared founding values – generous hospitality, transforming relationships and attentiveness to God. They're the touchstone I try to apply to everything we do. Only that way can I aim to turn my hopeful words into truthful actions.

We probably all have certain words or phrases that mean a lot to us spiritually, that we tend to come back to, or repeat a lot. We need to work hard at making them not empty words, but the springboard to real actions. The last part of Jesus' conversation with Peter was the shortest. 'Follow me' he said. And Peter did.

Lord God,

*St Martin found his purpose by meeting the needs of a beggar
and in doing so, met you.*

*We pray for St Martins House and all who work there,
That it may be a place of generous and transforming love,
Serving the people of this city and county.*

In the name of Christ who offers a welcome to all. Amen *St Martins House Prayer*

Saturday 11 June Barnabas John 15:12-17 Encouragement

Sister Christine James, Community of St Francis reflects

"You are my friends." These were Jesus' words to his disciples, his followers, as they approach the end of his earthly journey. He calls them friends twice in the passage – and he also tells them twice to love one another.

The change from servant or slave to friend is a huge change of status with huge responsibilities. There is an equality between friends, not a hierarchy, friends share their joys and their gifts - and their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, friends stand up for each other, friends encourage one another.

As individuals, our friendship with others makes us stronger but it can also challenge us. We live in a society where it is unlikely that we would ever be asked to lay down our lives for our friends but just how far are we willing to go? How far will we go in our generosity, our hospitality, our time and our willingness to make an extra effort when life is pressing in on all sides? Is there a point when true friendship has to say "no" and show tough love? How much do we test our own friends in their giving? How much do we encourage our friends and are encouraged by them?

Today we remember St Barnabas. Consider Barnabas and Paul, fellow travellers,

working and spreading the Word, bearing the fruit that will last. Surely in their adventures, their ups and their downs, their successes and their persecutions and failures, they must have been friends, encouraging each other, sharing the wonders of the good times and consoling one another when things were going wrong as they took the Good News from town to town.

As we think of Launde Abbey and St Martins House we realise that they are the fruits of ideas, encouraged and nurtured into the two splendid buildings, now open to serve and encourage us in our lives of faith, buildings and staff that are themselves now ready to bear fruit.

Now near the end of this journey of prayer, let us thank God for his encouragement and companionship along the way and for those friends who have shared the way with us and encouraged us especially the One who is always with us, Jesus, our master, guide and friend. What a friend we have in Jesus!

*Loving God, fill us with your spirit
that we may be open to hear your words of encouragement
through those around us
and that by our words and our actions
we may encourage others in their lives of faith.
This we ask in the name of Jesus,
our friend and our saviour. Amen.*

Canon David Monteith, Canon Chancellor reflects...

The philosopher Mark Vernon wrote following the last General Election, pointing out that part of the nation's uncertainty about coalition politics was also the discomfort around having two new friends (David and Nick) leading the country. Democracy on the one hand stands for fairness and equality whilst friendship stands for the particular and the personal with the possibility of nepotism. So thinkers like Immanuel Kant go on to point out that friendship is unethical within society because it is partial – it breaks the Golden Rule of love because it does not simply do to others as they would do to you but friendship demands far more – you go the extra mile for your friends, even laying down life for them. So Kant says there will be no friendship in heaven!

Barnabas was good friends with Paul – he sought out his companionship and counsel. He is said to have died as a martyr because of the friendship that he as a levite discovered with gentiles who had joined the fledgling Christian community – a friendship deemed to be dangerous to the state. He taught the church in Antioch how they were one friendship group in Christ and he defended that assertion at the Council of Jerusalem. His leadership in Antioch led to a generous donation being made to the poorer community in Jerusalem- friendship in action. Thus in Acts 4:36 he is described by Luke as 'son of encouragement'.

The word 'friend' isn't used in St Mark. Matthew and Luke use friendship words factually to describe someone's relationship (e.g friends of the centurion Luke 7:6) or they are used negatively (he was a friend of tax collectors and sinners Matt 11:19, Luke 7:34) but in John it is used many times positively. It is used both to describe earthly relationships such as that with Lazarus. It is also used of heavenly relationships - of the Father loving the Son. So one medieval Christian reflects further on this and says in contrast to Kant that 'God is friendship'.

Friends do go the extra mile; they can disagree and yet remain in relationship; they can risk the hostile stare or malicious gossip; they speak of deeper ties; they even demonstrate a love seen in the heart of the Trinity. At times making friends is the hardest thing, at others it is the easiest but always it is worthwhile. It is worth cultivating deeper friendship across our divides because they will show us more of God. These are thresholds that still need crossing.

Gracious God

We give thanks for friendship in Christ;

Deepen existing friendships,

Strengthen new friendships

Help us to imagine new friendships yet to be made.

In the name of the One who laid down life for friends. Amen

Sunday 12 June Pentecost John 20:19-23 Empowerment

Beth Marvin, a member of the Bishop's Youth Council reflects...

Sometimes I can feel very weak, my faith is weak and I wouldn't know what to say if anyone questioned what I believe. When I was at school, feeling like the only young Christian I felt alone and I wanted to hide, just like the disciples are doing here. Scared of what was behind the door.

Coming from a church where there weren't many young people I didn't talk to others my age about my faith, I'd always done it in an adult setting. I knew other Christians, but we were in our own little bubble at church, I didn't have any idea how to transfer that out into my school and friendship groups.

When people asked me about my faith I felt I couldn't say because I wasn't strong enough, why would they ever listen to what I've got to say? Although I knew what I believed, I couldn't fathom how on earth I would make it sound interesting to anyone else. My weakness was that I was afraid.

Jesus stood in front of the disciples and showed them his weakness, his scars. "Peace be with you" he says. Jesus is putting all of the fears to rest. He is saying to us, our faith doesn't have to be perfect, we don't need to be saintly or a spotless

image of holiness, only ourselves, living like God wanted us to, going out and showing Jesus' love.

That day Jesus gave his disciples his glory, and if you have that what is there to be afraid of? They were still going to face opposition, people are always going to against what you believe, but it's not half as frightening with Jesus by your side.

*O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness
and we feel our weakness and helplessness,
give us the sense of Your presence,
Your love, and Your strength.
Help us to have perfect trust in Your protecting love
and strengthening power,
so that nothing may frighten or worry us,
for, living close to You, we shall see Your hand,
Your purpose, Your will through all things. Amen*

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Bishop Tim Stevens, Bishop of Leicester reflects...

What do we do with our anxiety? I sometimes wonder if those who read the letters column of the Church Times would realise that Christians are supposed to be those who are at peace with the world! Instead we seem to be congenitally worried. Christians are concerned about the apparent decline of the Church in this country; about clergy numbers; about their marginalisation from society. Or we can be anxious about our church buildings, our finances or the sheer workload placed upon the clergy and lay church officers.

We can be comforted by the fact that when we worry we are in the company of the first disciples on the evening of the first Easter Day. They are behind locked doors, in fear of retribution from those who had put Jesus to death. Into the midst of their anxiety comes Jesus, revealing the wounds of the Cross and speaking the words: "Peace be with you".

There follows the giving of a gift: "Receive the Holy Spirit." The very life of Jesus, lived in an intimate relationship of love with God the Father, is now given to the disciples to be with them forever. They are to be released from fear and anxiety, from all that holds them back and makes them less than they could be. This gift of the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples to become witnesses to the Resurrection. From a small frightened group they reach out to spread the Gospel to every corner of the world. The Good News of the Resurrection of Jesus takes root within the next three centuries across the whole of the Mediterranean world and beyond.

This is the gift to us at Pentecost. The spirit of Jesus is not a spirit of fear or timidity but of courage and determination. It is the spirit we see in Jesus as he sets

his face to Jerusalem in spite of the dangers. It is the spirit we see in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross. To receive the gift of the spirit of Jesus Christ is to be empowered as He was, to do as He did, to suffer as He suffered and to know God as He knew Him. In that power and that spirit nothing is beyond us and nothing can prevent us from transforming the whole world.

*Loving God, pour out your spirit upon your people,
And grant to us
A new vision of your glory;
A new faithfulness to your word;
A new consecration to your service;
That your life may grow among us,
And your kingdom come;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

www.leicester.anglican.org

www.stmartinshouse.com

www.launde.org.uk

www.cathedral.leicester.anglican.org

www.stphilipscentre.co.uk

