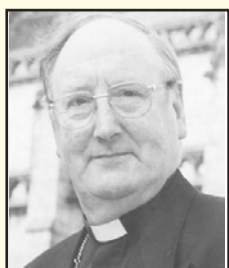


Pervaded by the word of God



SOMETIMES it can seem as if all the prayers we say are not being listened to by God. Then something happens which is an answer to our prayers, but it was not what we thought God would do: not what we were expecting God to do: maybe even not the way we would want him to respond.

In the last couple of months two things have happened in the life of the church in our country which are answers to prayers in ways perhaps we did not expect.

The first was the visitation of the relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux. It was an answer to prayer that we received this visitation during the Year of the Priest.

I don't think it was pure chance that they came to England and Wales during this Year of Prayer for Priests. St Thérèse is one of the patron saints for priests and during her life she was asked to accept as part of her work to pray for two young men who were priests. She had a great respect for the vocation to be a priest. She corresponded with them; encouraging them in their vocations and praying for them.

We, as UCM, pray for priests and vocations each day when we say the formal prayers of the UCM. These prayers, offered up faithfully by so many over the years are being answered even now when there are fewer priests in our parishes than before.

It is that God answers prayer by inviting us to "think outside the box" on occasion. He invites us to be prophets and see with God's eyes: to see beyond our own immediate perceived needs and to see the rich mystery of God's gifts.

We will have vocations when we truly see the mystery of the priesthood of Christ and value it. All God's graces to us are to help us enter into knowing and adoring him. If all we want, as an answer to our prayers for priests, is the convenience of a Sunday mass in our parish church, then we may pray for a long time and wonder if God is ever going to listen to us.

Maybe St Thérèse came to help us understand the mystery of Christ's priesthood, so that we can point it out to our young people (who came to venerate her relics in great numbers) and encourage them to enter into that mystery, as St Thérèse did. She believed in and was secure in her place in the priesthood of Christ. So pray to share the mystery.

The second answer to prayer that we need to reflect upon is Pope Benedict's Apostolic Constitution allowing groups from the Anglican Church to come into full communion with the Catholic Church. Again we have been praying for Christian Unity for many years: we have been growing more aware of the mystery of the Church through shared study of the doctrine of the Church.

It is certainly in answer to these prayers that the Pope has responded: it is a providential moment. The Holy Spirit is calling us to consider the mystery of the Church in the prayer of Christ that we be one in Him. Again this is an answer to the prayers of many Anglicans who are finding it more difficult to perceive the mystery of the priesthood of Christ in their own tradition.

It is providential that the Holy Father has responded in this generous way during the Year of the Priest. We are all being invited to reflect on the mystery of the priesthood of Christ, into which we are all baptised and out of which we are all sent to proclaim the good news. "Are we truly pervaded by the word of God?"

Is that word truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world? Do we really know that world? Do we love it? Are we deeply engaged with this word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives and shapes our thinking?" (Pope Paul VI) Let us pray!

+ Terence Brain

MEMBERS from several Foundations, gathered for the annual Study Day held at Alexander House in Bristol.

In the first session Fr Richard McKay, the parish priest at St. Nicholas Tolentino, and his colleague, Mrs Mary Hopper, gave a joint presentation about their work through the Prison Chaplaincy at Horfield and Eastwood Park prisons. Horfield had been downgraded from a High Security to a Category B prison for just over 600 men, mostly for those on a short term, from the courts, on remand or trial or newly convicted; Eastwood Park was the female prison, many of whom had been sentenced for minor misdemeanours such as debt and poverty related offences. When Fr Richard had been appointed as parish priest, over 12 years ago, no mention was made of his role as a prison chaplain! Mary had taught at a school in Hansworth, where most of her pupils were either children of prison staff or from prisoners' families, so her interest in issues relating to prisoners grew from her experiences and she was pleased to work with Fr. Richard on moving to St. Nicholas' parish.

Both speakers wore their prison belts to describe the various pieces of equipment they carried as well as their identification badges and a tally, which was exchanged for a set of keys giving access to any prison cells. All new admissions had to be seen by a prison chaplain within 24 hours of admission. Most came from a dysfunctional background, many having been

brought up by grandparents who had often provided some stability; given the closeness to them, leave to attend family funerals was not extended to grandparents, often causing great distress.

Disturbing statistics showed that in male prisons 70 per cent had been through the care system before imprisonment, 65 per cent had been abused in some way as children, 90 were from the most impoverished 10 per cent of the population, a high number were illiterate or innumerate, had poor social and communication skills and 80 per cent of all criminal activity was drug or alcohol related. Government policy was one of containment rather than rehabilitation and Fr. Richard felt strongly that the Prison Service was not fit for purpose. A high degree of self-harm occurred and due to new DNA techniques an increasing number of elderly were imprisoned. There was a hospital wing for the sick-many with long-term illnesses or dementia. It was a sad place where the staff had no concept of the spiritual needs of the dying.

Fr Richard felt strongly that no-one should die in prison. As a member of the Senior Management Team, he found it difficult to balance his role as a pastor and that of challenging the prison system. Apart from attending the Catholic Prison Chaplain's annual conference, he received no other means of support.

Mary then gave us some disturbing statistics about women prisoners. 95 per cent had been

sexually abused; apart from the USA England had the highest number of female and juvenile prisoners in the world; the prisons were often far away from their families and separation from their children caused major problems; there was a high rate of attempted suicide as well as self harming. We heard several moving stories about individual prisoners, describing how they had come to terms with themselves through attending the weekly 'Journey in Faith' group.

After attending a deeply moving Mass, said by Fr Richard in his nearby church, we had a quick break for lunch, before listening to another fascinating talk. Tim Snowdon, the director of a Christian charity called 'Changing Tunes' talked about the role of music as therapy to prisoners. Founded in 1987, by Richard Pendlebury, the Director of Emmaus, sufficient funds were raised to appoint Tim and to register it as a charity in 2000. 13 prisons in the south of England have benefited from his work and many awards had been won through the Koestler Trust competitions. Music was found to be popular with prisoners, helping both men and women to improve their self esteem. Only 7.4 per cent of ex-prisoners attending music therapy, had re-offended - the national average being 67 per cent. The charity was able to keep in touch with ex-prisoners, concerts being performed both in prison and in the community, often in churches. Some prisoners had gone in to schools to talk about

their experiences, which had proved to be the best deterrent in preventing drug abuse. Professional musicians, all from local churches, were paid to provide three or four music sessions, lasting two and a half hours, each week.

The Government only provided 20 per cent funding, the rest had to be raised through churches, charities and various activities. Some prisons contributed towards costs but as the Government would only use large organisations, pastoral care through smaller charities, such as 'Changing Tunes' would soon be lost as they couldn't match target driven, mechanised and centralised Government demands. Tim reiterated all that had been described in the morning session.

There is no doubt that a change in policy regarding the education and rehabilitation of prisoners is overdue. The system has always been under funded. We were all shocked by the situation, but recognised the wonderful work undertaken by people such as Fr Richard, Mary Hopper and Tim Snowdon. In summing up Fr Richard said that whilst understanding that the victims of crime also suffer, and that prisoners must acknowledge their guilt, forgiveness, repentance and Christianity were essential for healing. It was a challenging day for us all and we pray that others will get involved to help improve the prison service.

Pat Uglov,
UCM Secretary, Clifton Diocese

CLIFTON

Sheila Kneebone RIP

NORTHAMPTON Diocese was sorry to hear that Sheila Kneebone, a valued member of her church in Luton and a tireless ambassador for UCM has died. Sheila was a past National Vice President, Study Day Officer and National Representative for the Lay Apostolate.

She was part of the infamous UCM 'Recruitment Road Show', a group of people put together by Val James who quickly became friends and travelled the country visiting every diocese in 12 months. She helped to draft a booklet which started out as a recruitment tool and was then taken up by Margaret McNicholas and collated into the HATS book.

Sheila was a state registered nurse and midwife. She was married to John, a doctor in Luton, and after her three children grew up she trained to lecture in Child Development.

When she retired, apart from her UCM work, she was an advisor to the Family Network Organisation in Luton. During the last few years Sheila has been a staunch member of the RCIA team. She will be sadly missed.

Jenny Hyde,
Media Officer

TOO MUCH TOO SOON

THERE are few parts of the school curriculum which have aroused stronger feelings and greater controversy in the past 30-40 years than sex education.

Amid growing concern about the increasing rates of teenage pregnancies and cases of sexually transmitted diseases, the Government has tried to respond to the situation by suggesting that sex and relationship education should be made available to every child. Parents, meantime, have been left confused and questioning, unsure about their position and wondering whether they have any influence over what their children are taught.

In order to answer their questions, Norman Wells, Director of the Family Education Trust has written 'Too much too Soon', a booklet which deals with the current situation on sex education and how it has changed so that now there may be no recognition of moral absolutes and young people are not to be given any clear moral direction.

Mr Wells sets out clearly what parents should know about the sex education being offered to their children and suggests that the whole issue needs to be approached honestly and modestly and within a clear moral framework. I would heartily recommend this booklet to all concerned with upholding marriage and family life.

It is available from the Family Education Trust, Jubilee House, 19-21 High Street Whitton, Twickenham TW2 7LB price 33.50 for one copy; £12.50 for five copies; £22.50 for 10 copies and £50 for 25 copies.

Monica Scudder,
Public Service Officer


HALLAM

DIOCESAN President Dorothy Fishwick, Kath Staniland and her daughter Helen, visited us in September.


After Mass Dorothy spoke about the changing face of our society, her regret about schools not having assemblies and very little Christian teaching at all. Many children do not even know the Our

Father. Families were fragmented and this led to poor meals and many problems with relationships. We need to have a national identity. As a teacher she has seen so many changes - not all for the better. Everyone really enjoyed Dorothy's talk and a vote of thanks was given on behalf of the mothers.

Angela Mellors, Media Officer



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