

Dear friends,

I received the phone call on Saturday to say that all the arrangements to provide food for our car park opening party via a well-known supermarket had fallen through. Time to panic?

Well, When the going gets tough the tough get going! My heartfelt thanks to everyone at St. Peter's (you know who you are) who rallied and organised, cooked and served a superb lunch for 45 people at 24 hours' notice of cottage pie and peas followed by cream cakes washed down with wine. Our Archdeacon was our guest who preached at the service, blessed our car park and thoroughly enjoyed the liturgy and meal. So much so that he made it known that an invite back to St. Peter's would be very welcome indeed.

Welcome back Fran! Our wonderful and hard-working administrator enjoyed a marvellous fortnight's break in the Italian Alps. There was plentiful snow despite fears to the contrary and the whole family thoroughly enjoyed their first go at skiing. Her welcome back to the fold saw Fran in the kitchen washing up at the aforementioned lunch – we know how to treat people!

Sunday the 15th January – Epiphany 2

I will be presiding at St. Peter's at the 8am and 10am services and Reverend Colin Randall will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's at the 9.30 and 11am services respectively. This will also see the first outing of "Funfaith" in the Peter Hall this morning, so we hope to welcome the children at the end of the morning service. At 6pm I will also preside at Choral evensong

Isaiah 49: 1-7. This is the second of the "servant songs" and as ever the "servant" can be at times interpreted as being Israel herself, Isaiah himself or applied to Jesus as the fulfilment of the perfect prophet (and servant) of Israel. They all serve the purposes of God in the world, first within the context of Israel but only when Israel/Isaiah/Jesus is proved true to their calling is worship from all nations is the result.

1 Corinthians 1: 1-9. Whatever else Paul feels he needs to say to the Corinthian church, this opening to the letter puts it all in the context that he feels blessed by them and is truly thankful for them. He starts with a word of encouragement and to keep the faith. A salient message to us at the

beginning of the week of Christian unity that whatever problems or difficulties we have with fellow Christian churches or denominations, our baseline is that we should be thankful for them.

John 1: 29-42. Most people are familiar with the fact that chapter 1 of this gospel is an introduction to the rest of the book and the first half is a meditation on Jesus in the light of eternity (The word of God) from the readings at Christmas. The rest of chapter 1 that we hear today is also an introduction, but this is a historical one set in time and includes the confession of John the Baptist that Jesus is the “lamb of God” and “Messiah” and (in v49) as “king of Israel”. John is presented as being subservient to Jesus but at the same time spiritually gifted and insightful. In contrast to other gospel accounts that picture Jesus choosing Andrew and his brother Peter while they were fishing here Andrew (and by implication Peter) is presented as a follower of John the Baptist who is steered in the right direction by John the Baptist himself.

Thought for the day

Taking pride of place on my desk is a photo of me with Archbishop Rowan Williams nearly twenty years ago on the day of my being ordained priest, a copy of Rublev’s icon of the three visitors, a wooden carving of my first church where I served my curacy – St. John the Baptist Margate – presented to me when I left, and a lovely pot presented to me when I left St. Mary’s Gainford made by Harry, a lovely old war veteran, and fixture of that parish until he died, who had a wonderful and dry sense of humour. So, I am surrounded by memories of my historical journey in the church accompanied by a constant reminder of why I do any of this at all in that icon that represents the reality of God as revealed in the Christian revelation. So, a real mixture of the spiritual and the earthy. I used to think that my job was to try and unite the two things – spiritual and material- in a proper priestly fashion that we call sacramentalism – that assumes they are separate and need bringing together. But as I get older, I see that they have always been one thing, inextricably intertwined, and what I do as a priest is simply frame and point out that fact. Where is God? God is in the ordinary everyday turmoil of life, accessible at every point. He is the love and relationship we each of us feel in our families and friends. God is love, relationship, fellowship – Communion. He is beyond us (the Father), within us (the son) and the relationship between us (the Spirit).

The Prayer for Today is by Fr. Richard Rohr

Loving God, we love how you love us. We love how you free us. We love what you have given and created to surround us. Help us to recognize, and to rejoice in, what has been given, even in the midst of what is not given. Help us not to doubt all that you have given us, even when we feel our very real shortcomings. We thank you for the promise and sign of your love in the Eternally Risen Christ, pervading all things in the universe, unbound by any of our categories of logic or theology.

We offer you ourselves back in return. We offer you our bodies, our little lives, our racing minds and restless hearts into this one wondrous circle of Love that is You. My life is no longer just about me, but it is all about *you*.

Love and peace,

Martin