

Dear friends,

I'll start with this extract from my statement made first to our church councils and then to the rest of the congregations.

**On Thursday** 27th November I met with Bishop Mike Harrison and told him that I would be retiring at Easter next year thus giving the church just over four months' notice.

My last service in St. Peter's will be Easter Sunday which is on April 5th. My last services in All Saints and St. Michael's will be on Palm Sunday

I acknowledge that I owe the church an enormous debt of gratitude and have always served whatever congregation I have been privileged to be their priest with a sense of profound duty and love.

From Margate to Bucharest, from Gainford to Winston, From Tynemouth to Budleigh Salterton, East Budleigh and Otterton, it has been a pleasure to be your vicar and while nobody is perfect, I have always tried to serve with integrity, doing the best I can.

Easter Sunday is four months off, and everything carries on as normal between now and then. Naturally I will not be starting anything new or making any decisions that my successor will have to deal with or engaging with anything that will have to be sustained after I've gone. So may God bless you all.

**The Exeter University singers** were magnificent at All Saints church last Friday. On a filthy day, well over a hundred people settled into their complementary glass of wine to listen to a wonderful programme. My personal favourite was "O Holy night" which I personally think is the finest Christmas carol ever, though other personal favourites are available. Around £1250 after expenses was raised by the evening.

### **Sunday 14th December – Advent 3**

I will preside at both services in the morning at St. Peter's and also at choral evensong at 6pm and Reverend Jean Burrows will preside at All saints and St. Michael's respectively.

**Isaiah 35: 1-10.** When the Messiah comes "the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped". God bringing Health and peace will be the certain signs that the kingdom of God has come among us. The Hebrew concept of "shalom" doesn't mean a fragile peace – an interlude in hostilities, but a permanent all-encompassing peace where former opponents are brought together as one.

**James 5: 7-10.** According to James, patience is a prime virtue for Christians. And we need it, because the state of the world might suggest that this magnificent "day of the Lord" seems always just out of reach. But until that final day, we keep that beatific vision always in our mind to provide the vision of that perfect future that fuels our present words and actions.

**Matthew 11: 2-11.** In a very human bout of doubt and questioning, John basically asks Jesus, via his followers, "Are you really the Messiah? Or have I got the wrong man". Jesus answers via his actions pointed out in our Isaiah reading today regarding exhibiting signs of the kingdom like healing the blind and deaf. Jesus goes on to [raise John as himself being a figure prophesied by Malachi of a "messenger sent to clear the path" before Jesus.

### **Thought for Today**

Priests are used to moving on in their career from one place to another, but the biggest wrench is always leaving the people. I mentioned a list of them earlier. Margate was a tough UPA (urban priority area) parish, but I met some of the warmest "salt of the earth"

types there as a curate and I learned things there that would prepare me for a life of ministry. My next leap (and it was a huge leap) was to be the vicar of the church of the resurrection in Bucharest. I was also +Rowan William's Apokrisarios (personal representative) to Patriarch Teoctist. The congregation there had a hard core of British expats but was also truly international, with Americans providing the financial backbone, supporting a rainbow coalition of Africans, Asians, disaffected Romanians and other Europeans. My chance to witness and encounter the Orthodox church up close and personal has also sustained me on my journey. We returned to Britain in County Durham – Gainford and Winston which provided the backdrop to major life events for me – the death of Alexandra and subsequent marriage to Louise in what was dubbed the wedding of the century (Move over Charles and Di). I learned the value of true friendship in those villages, and it was such a wrench to leave there but as Louise worked in Newcastle, and the commute was tortuous, we knew what we had to do and I got a transfer to Holy Saviours, Tynemouth. My mum's a Geordie and my parents started their life in Newcastle – and Louise had rented in Tynemouth some years earlier – so it all fit even down to me having one large parish to myself. But all good things come to an end and when Louise was offered a professor's chair at Exeter university, we both knew we had to follow that particular star, which led us to end up in East Devon. It is a part of the country that we love and in which we have decided to stay, buying a house in Sidmouth. So we are leaving again but not going too far and we'll keep many associations that we've built up over what will be nearly eight years. But it is not over yet! We still have until Easter Sunday here before we go. I just want to thank the literally hundreds and hundreds of people I have met along the way, perhaps I may have helped, and more particularly have helped me in so many ways. God bless you all.

**The prayer for Today** is by Harry Williams CR (RIP) and is from my formative days at Mirfield college and Monastery. Harry became a monk and was still alive (just) when I attended Mirfield and he didn't communicate with the ordinands – a cussed bloody-minded recluse basically -but his influence outlives him in his collected books, sermons and prayers. This is brutally honest and dour.

**O God I am hellishly angry.  
I think so-and-so is a swine.  
I am tortured by worry about this and that.  
I am pretty certain I have missed my chances in life.  
This and that has left me feeling terribly depressed.  
But nonetheless here I am like this,  
Feeling both bloody and bloody minded,  
I am going to stay here for ten minutes.  
You are most unlikely to give me anything, I know that. But I am going to stay for the ten minutes nonetheless.**

Love and peace,  
Martin