

Dear friends,

The curry and quiz night was its usual success, only marred by the fact that we were beaten by 1 point by the choir team. But seriously, well done to everyone and especially to Tony Gray who puts so much time into putting this quiz together. Mandy provided a superb curry as usual.

Friday night I woke up at 2am with Labyrinthitis – a middle ear infection – in which the world spins uncontrollably. On Saturday, I fell over during Yoga and staggered back home feeling a bit sick, On Sunday I managed to make it through two services without incident. Still occasionally a bit wobbly, I am at about 90% and hope to be fully well again soon.

On Sunday - I, Robert Charles, Jean Burrows and Ken Parry all found our way to Solo's lunch where the question was posed "What do you call a gathering of vicars?". A Prudence apparently!

Sunday 1st February – Candlemas

I will preside at both services at St. Peter's and Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's at 11am.

Malachi 3: 1-4. The word for an Angel and a messenger are the same in Hebrew and that word is Malachi. God is going to send his messenger to the Jerusalem Temple in order to refine and purify the Temple. As ever, the purity of Temple worship is directly linked to Justice in society. You cannot have one without the other.

Hebrews 2: 14-18. The writer of Hebrews stresses how it was all important that Jesus, God's son, should also be fully human. He shares our flesh and blood and suffers and dies, just as we do, so He becomes the perfect sacrifice for the human race. The high priest of the Temple had to be human being of course and so Jesus becomes both the high priest who offers the sacrifice and the sacrifice offered.

Luke 2: 22-40. Luke has conflated two distinct rites here for the presentation of the first-born entails no visit to the Temple while the purification of Mary together with the appropriate sacrifices are what is really being described here. However, the main focus of Luke is to evoke the flavour of old Israel, making the point that however new and decisive Jesus is, he is no bolt from the blue but rooted in the Jewish faith, with Simeon and Anna, as spirit-led representatives of Old Israel, "anointing" this new action of God in the world.

Thought for the Day

The very idea of blood sacrifice is so alien to the modern Western world that many people are tempted to lay aside this important aspect of the Jesus event as being a bit unsavoury and contrary to modern sensibilities. The author of Hebrews, as everyone else in the first century accepted it as a very normal part of life, and if we reject that notion of sacrifice the whole edifice of Jesus being an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world starts to fall apart. Having experimented over the years by trying to understand Jesus' death in other ways, which never quite satisfied, I have

returned to what I consider to be the revealed truth – That Jesus died for our sins on the cross.

Many clever erudite people have tried to explain the crucifixion in other ways, and they have much to commend them but only, for me, as a supplementary way of looking at and contemplating the cross of Christ and never displacing the main reason.

We are all more naturally squeamish nowadays and resistant to the notion of taking an animal's life in the cause of a sacrifice. But looking at that more positively means that the one eternal sacrifice of Jesus means that now, we don't have to. The understanding of the sacrificial process bleeds naturally into the Holy Communion service, where the flesh of the animal sacrificed was shared with those making the sacrifice and the blood of the animal sprinkled on the altar.

In this very brief precis of the sacrificial system and the Communion service which flows from it which are inextricably linked, we are forced to confront the realities of the ancient world and mind ourselves that we don't project back onto them our modern mores and sensibilities.

The Prayer for Today is in part a comment to what I said above is a prayer of St. Francis, who famously loved animals, considering them his brothers and sisters, but was not a vegetarian and loved the Mass, as the revealed will of God.

**Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
Give us miserable ones the grace to do for you alone
What we know you want us to do
And always to desire what pleases you.
Inwardly cleansed,
Interiorly enlightened and inflamed by the fire of
The Holy Spirit,
May we be able to follow in the footprints of your
Beloved Son,
Our Lord Jesus Christ
And, by your grace alone,
May we make our way to you, Most high,
Who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple
Unity,
And are glorified,
God almighty,
For ever and ever.
Amen.**

Love and peace,

Martin