



TIMES OF THE LITURGY

Sunday - 7.45am - Lauds | 8.15am - Low Mass | 9.15am - Dominican Rite Mass (Extraordinary Form) | 11am - Sung Conventual Mass | 6pm - Low Mass | 7pm - Vespers.

Monday - Friday - 7am - Lauds | 7.30am - Conventual Mass | 6.15pm - Devotions and Meditation | 6.30pm - Vespers. [N.B. First Fridays of the month, Vespers in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament with a period of Adoration from 6.15pm.]

Saturday - 9am - Lauds | 9.30am - Conventual Mass | 4.30-6pm - Confessions | 6.15pm - Sung Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary | 6.30pm - Vespers.

THIS WEEK

Sun 16 **XI SUNDAY PER ANNUM**

Mon 17 *feria*

Tue 18 *feria*

Wed 19 *feria*

Thu 20 St Alban

Fri 21 St Aloysius Gonzaga

Sat 22 Ss JOHN FISHER &

THOMAS MORE

Sun 23 **XII SUNDAY PER ANNUM**



Lauds, Mass, and Vespers are broadcast daily on Radio Maria.

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<https://radiomariaengland.uk/>

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cambridge.bursar@english.op.org

What is knowing? From 23 to 26 August 2024, the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst, Clitheroe will be offering a residential course on Divine, human, and artificial intelligence. For more information, please visit <https://christianheritagecentre.com/events>

The Historical Association in association with Waterstones is putting on a History Day on the morning of Saturday 29 June at Waterstones, in which Dr Lucy Underwood will be speaking on Catholics in Tudor England. Dr Underwood is a Research Fellow at Warwick University and her academic career has been rooted in researching the lives of Catholics, notably children, in Tudor England. The event starts at 10am and continues until lunchtime. Tickets cost £8.00 and are available from Waterstones: <https://www.waterstones.com/events/history-days-in-collaboration-with-the-historical-association/cambridge>.

Theology After Blackfriars: You are invited to an engaging two-day discussion of the intellectual contributions of the Oxford Dominicans of the last century. The conference will take place at Blackfriars Oxford, from Tuesday 25th to Wednesday 26th June. For further details, please visit <https://www.english.op.org/latest-news/theology-after-blackfriars-academic-conference>.

TWO POETS ON DEATH

Some poets are openly Christian, some are opposed to Christianity, others seem more ambiguous. Few writing in English manage to ignore Christianity entirely. Philip Larkin, 1922-1985, is a good example of an atheist and disbeliever in life after death, at least so he has been taken, but his poetry makes references to attending Churches for various reasons and he did so attend from time to time in his life. One of his most famous poems, *Aubade*, is a poem which speaks most intensely of the horror of ceasing to exist. In the poem he insists that there is 'nothing more terrible, nothing more true', and calls religion 'that vast moth-eaten musical brocade, created to pretend that we never die.' Religion has to his mind, gradually eroded, though in another famous poem, 'Church going', he worries about what would happen if religion fades so much that there is no seriousness left. I am not sure if Larkin succeeds in 'Aubade' in portraying non-existence and in another poem, 'The old fools' we have what seems to be an implied belief in a sort of pre-existence waiting for this life.

*At death, you break up: the bits that were you
Start speeding away from each other for ever
With no one to see. It's only oblivion, true:
We had it before, but then it was going to end,
And was all the time merging with a unique endeavour
To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower
Of being here. Next time you can't pretend
There'll be anything else.*

An earlier poet, the American Wallace Stevens, 1879-1955, was even more ambiguous about life after death. He died in a catholic nursing home, where the chaplain said that he was received into full communion as a Catholic though his daughter denied this. Whatever the case, his poems have a Christian background. Yet his own beliefs are well hidden. In his poem, 'Sunday Morning' he imagines a woman at home on a Sunday whose problem with Christianity is that she sees death as necessary to give life meaning. Since it is not the poet speaking, we cannot tell what his belief is. The woman in her comfortable home, where she is on a Sunday and not at church, sees her comfortable life dissipating 'The holy hush of ancient sacrifice'. Death seems necessary because the alternative is a frozen version of our reality.

*Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?*

Larkin and Stevens would seem to be taking the opposite attitude to death. For Larkin it is the ultimate unacceptable but unavoidable reality. For Stevens' woman, it is death that makes life meaningful. Death gives us seasons of change. Yet both see this life as the apex of desirability. Even though Larkin did not enjoy life, it was all there was for him. Stevens did seem to enjoy life, which is the great attraction of his poetry, which is happy to look at things 'exactly as they are', to quote from a later poem, 'The Blue Guitar'. Yet Stevens also saw that this world needed something outside itself to be meaningful. When he received an honorary degree from Bard College, he said in his speech that 'On Easter the great ghost of what we call the next world invades and vivifies this present world, so that Easter seems like a day of two lights, one the sunlight of the bare and physical end of winter, the other the double light'.

In this speech, he calls this greater world 'unreal' but this does not necessarily mean that he is denying the existence of another world. He calls poetry unreal too, because it is the larger thing that surrounds our mundane existence, something called up by imagination, or I would say, by faith. Either way, there is a need for the world to be more than the world, if the world is to mean anything at all to us.

I would agree with the woman in the poem, 'Sunday Morning' that death shapes our world. I would even agree that it gives our life some meaning. Our Lord could have brought death to an end but chose not to do so. He accepted death for himself and so for all subsequent humanity. Yet death is now only part of a greater thing, a gateway to a greater life. Larkin merely rejects that the woman makes a better challenge to the life offered in Christ. She sees only what the new life is not, where due to the absence of death, there is no change. I think that attempts to describe heaven fall into this trap. We are used to change, we need winter to appreciate summer, we expect to always be learning new things, and we are addicted to time. Our idea of happiness is to reach an apex of experience, a pinnacle to which we aspire, even if the price of this is to accept that afterwards we must go downhill.

***...At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink
Downwards to darkness on extended wings.***

These are the last words of 'Sunday Morning', but a little earlier, the woman hears:

***...A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering
It is the grave of Jesus where he lay"...***

We are to move on from that grave, and we may trust that heaven is great enough for our needs. Perhaps that is why Christ is transfigured on a mountain. The apostles want to stay there, but Christ takes them back down the mountain. Later he will ascend higher than any mountain, he will go beyond their imagination. We cannot imagine heaven, and we should not try. Remember the words of St Paul:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

From a letter of St Thomas More

Although I know well, Margaret, that because of my past wickedness I deserve to be abandoned by God, I cannot but trust in his merciful goodness. His grace has strengthened me until now and made me content to lose goods, land, and life as well, rather than to swear against my conscience. God's grace has given the king a gracious frame of mind towards me, so that as yet he has taken from me nothing but my liberty. In doing this His Majesty has done me such great good with respect to spiritual profit that I trust that among all the great benefits he has heaped so abundantly upon me I count my imprisonment the very greatest. I cannot, therefore, mistrust the grace of God. Either he shall keep the king in that gracious frame of mind to continue to do me no harm, or else, if it be his pleasure that for my other sins I suffer in this case as I shall not deserve, then his grace shall give me the strength to bear it patiently, and perhaps even gladly.

By the merits of his bitter passion joined to mine and far surpassing in merit for me all that I can suffer myself, his bounteous goodness shall release me from the pains of purgatory and shall increase my reward in heaven besides.

I will not mistrust him, Meg, though I shall feel myself weakening and on the verge of being overcome with fear. I shall remember how Saint Peter at a blast of wind began to sink because of his lack of faith, and I shall do as he did: call upon Christ and pray to him for help. And then I trust he shall place his holy hand on me and in the stormy seas hold me up from drowning.

And if he permits me to play Saint Peter further and to fall to the ground and to swear and forswear, may God our Lord in his tender mercy keep me from this, and let me lose if it so happen, and never win thereby! Still, if this should happen, afterwards I trust that in his goodness he will look on me with pity as he did upon Saint Peter, and make me stand up again and confess the truth of my conscience afresh and endure here the shame and harm of my own fault.

And finally, Margaret, I know this well: that without my fault he will not let me be lost. I shall, therefore, with good hope commit myself wholly to him. And if he permits me to perish for my faults, then I shall serve as praise for his justice. But in good faith, Meg, I trust that his tender pity shall keep my poor soul safe and make me commend his mercy.

And, therefore, my own good daughter, do not let your mind be troubled over anything that shall happen to me in this world. Nothing can come but what God wills. And I am very sure that whatever that be, however bad it may seem, it shall indeed be the best.

THE PRIORY OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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