



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 8 **ADVENT II**

Mon 9 **THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION (TRANS)**

Tue 10 Martyrs of East Anglia

Wed 11 *feria*

Thu 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe

Fri 13 S Lucy

Sat 14 S John of the Cross

Sun 15 **ADVENT III**

The Jean Grove Trust Blackfriars Ethiopia Project will hold their Advent Fair **TODAY at noon, immediately after 11 am Mass, in the Library.** Mulled apple and homemade mince pies will be served. Please come and support the work of the Jean Grove Trust.



THE PRIOR & COMMUNITY

INVITE YOU TO OUR



GAUDETE SUNDAY PARTY

SUNDAY 15 DECEMBER AFTER THE EVENING MASS



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cambridge.bursar@english.op.org

The Dominican Sisters are having 'A Day of Recollection for Women' on Saturday 21st. December at St Catherine's Convent 155 Huntingdon Road Camb. CB3 0DH. The day will begin at 10 a.m. and will include reflections on the theme of Advent. Mass will be celebrated during the day and there will be a time for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the opportunity for Confession. The day will conclude at 4pm with Benediction and Vespers. Light refreshments will be available. (suggested donation £15) To book a place please contact Sr Angela at <angelamleydon@gmail.com> or mobile <07968 091 751>.

On the next two Sundays there will be a special collection for Christmas flowers for the chapel. There will be a basket outside the chapel for donations, and you can also donate online by marking the donation 'For Flowers'.

ARE YOU THE ONE WHO IS TO COME?

When John heard in his prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' Matthew 11.2.

John the Baptist is struggling. So he ought to be. A sudden agnosticism has gripped him at the heart, he is a prey to sudden misgivings! He had thought he had seen the Holy Spirit come down like a dove, and heard the voice from heaven declare the beloved Son, the moment Jesus was baptised. Yet the age of the Spirit has still not come. He had thought the axe was already laid to the foot of the trees, meaning the false unfruitful Pharisees, but the Pharisees are still going strong. He had expected the Messiah to beat out the corn on the floor of the barn and burn the useless chaff (we were born too late to see a farmer do that. Perhaps still in Africa). These are both violent images, telling of the use of brute force.

John, the prophet of doom and gloom, had foretold a fire of judgement and a bonfire of vanities. Not, a Christ who is gentle and humble in heart. Not, one who says come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Not, a man seen to eat and drink with sinners, meaning those who are far from goodness and from God. Not, someone heard to say her sins, her many sins, have been forgiven because she shows such love. Who is this who shows such mercy where great John condemns? Not doom but understanding and compassion?

John, you are a false prophet telling stories! You might get a job as the imposter doing sign language at a funeral. Your Messiah should have thrown out that cruel Herod, that fox. Instead he is a scandal. The one who would judge the earth? You are the one on whom judgment is passed, for you witnessed boldly to the moral law, condemning Herod for his bigamy, and now you are chained up in the dark, and Herod is walking about in the Galilean sunshine. If this truly were the Messiah to come to break oppression and set the captives free, wouldn't he have let you out first and locked up all the Herods to boot? Has it dawned on you what is going to happen to you instead?

Not one of the more comfy Christmas stories, is it? Some people at Mass today are quite English, have you noticed? English people call Christmas the children's feast. It means they get a chance to relive their own English childhood, close to the baby gurgling and cooing in the manger (or perhaps boo-hooing if theirs happens to be a dolorous spirituality). Christmas could be an excuse to escape from all the pressures and rediscover the simple joys of childhood.

But John the Baptist's is an adult question, and we are sometimes quite adult on a good day. And adult faith has challenges to meet, for us as for the Baptist. There is such a thing as reverse evangelisation. The evangel is the good news of the gospel of God and the gift we have to share. Pope Francis says it can't happen by proselytising, but only by attraction. You are very attractive Christians. Well, I think you are. Your priests know best!

But reverse evangelisation, that happens when the world of scepticism and unbelief evangelises us, sets the agenda for us. When we find ourselves thinking like agnostics. There is a relentless materialism that worms its way into our hearts, courses through our veins, and spreads itself in all our actions. We are quite frightened to admit in public that the spiritual dimension of life matters at all, most people would think we were weird. Well, that at least is true, we certainly are weird!

Honestly now, did we let the secular world teach us that no-one gives thanks before meals any more? or kneels down to pray with the children at bedtime? or takes a break from all those lit up screens to open the book of the gospels and let the word of God speak in the silence? Now, Our Lord only tells us to pray, not at what moments or how often. Only if we don't really go for a personal encounter with our Lord, or at least an openness to letting him encounter us, will we hold up when trials come?

So often, what challenges my faith is the experience of sadness, desolation and distress. By me of course I, as always, mean you! Is that what makes John the Baptist in his prison lose his hold? Doubt seeps in and makes him reach out for reassurance. Are you really the Messiah who was to come? Are we in fact still waiting for someone else? It must have been appallingly difficult for him, the great champion – the greatest of every mother's son, the Elijah who was to come – to have to admit that his light had gone out.

But if I had never had that experience, what would that say about me? How did I miss my crisis of unbelief? Maybe I wasn't there when it happened. Was it that I did not reflect too much about the mysteries of faith, stay equipped and engaged in thought and study and discussion? Did I avoid the tough questions the teenagers put to me? We believe in what we are still thinking about, said St Augustine. Perhaps the Satan forgot me, he didn't find me worthy to do battle with the enemy. When the crunch comes shall I stop turning my heart towards Christ my redeemer, friend and brother, and really set off to find someone else?

I was in at a John the Baptist moment with some friends at Wymondham the other day. From time to time I go over to lead discussion in the parish, and the topic this time was an Advent one, it was about the sacrament of penance. You know, the sacrament the bright young things do?

It was a very frank exchange. So many people reported disappointments, dashed expectations. Confession is a sacrament with its difficulties, it can leave some people feeling more like the church of John the Baptist than the Church of Jesus the Messiah. There is a lot of hurt. We heard of a person who left the Church because of trouble over confession. The woman in a difficult marriage who would never have chosen a celibate male to tell her stuff to: "they don't know where we are coming from." The person told, don't worry, who just felt fended off. Some had heard a suggestion voiced in public places that the sacrament is used as a license for bad priests to continue in evil ways.

But then just when I thought all was lost other voices broke in, the people who had found hope and encouragement, who had wept tears and not of sadness, for the joy that had come into the world. When someone spoke of the joy of the father of the Prodigal Son in the parable, there were nods and smiles around the circle. The name of God is mercy, and no-one is outside the mercy, there is no wound that cannot be healed. So we began to witness to one another about the love of our heavenly Father, who knows when one sparrow falls to the ground. And to see and hear, like disciples.

"I could not have the annulment I needed and despaired of it, and I told my story to the bishop in confession and opened my heart to him. He understood and guided me, and then he absolved me, and set me free."

'Go and tell John what you hear and see. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me.' - I wonder. Are we too being asked to meditate on our experiences, our life in Christ, and take heart? He has given us eyes to see with, ears to hear with, a mouth to proclaim the gospel with, and hands to do the work of God with, and we are not scandalized but rejoice at the coming of our Emmanuel. John the Baptist was sent his answer too, and having prepared the way of the Lord by his life, prepared it to the very end, marked it out by giving his life for the truth, like one going out in joy to meet the bridegroom. A prophet, yes, and more than a prophet is here.

fr Bob Eccles, OP



CHRISTMAS MASSES

Tuesday 24 December

5pm - Vigil Mass | 6.30pm - Solemn Vespers | 11pm - Vigils & Midnight Mass

Wednesday 25 December

7.45am - Lauds | 8.15am - Low Mass | 9.15am Mass (Dominican Rite) | 11am Sung Mass | 6.30pm Solemn Vespers

(Note no evening Mass!)

THE PRIORY OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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