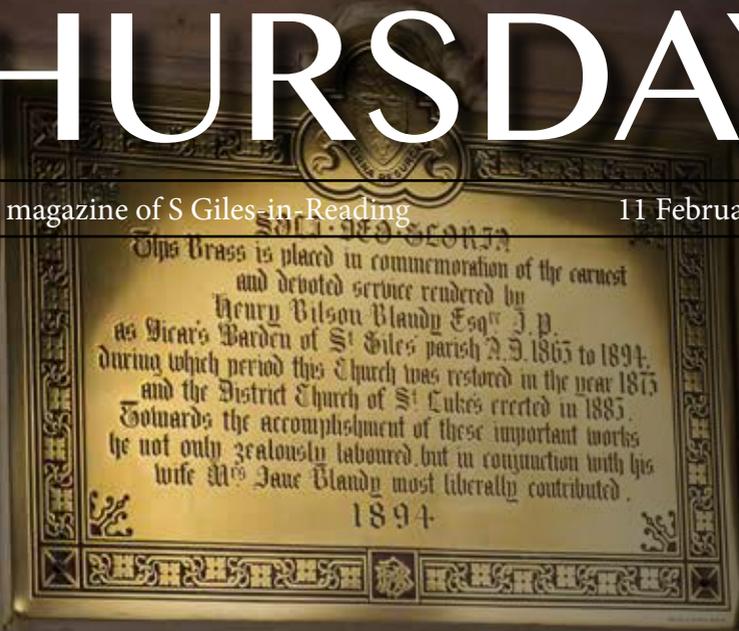


THURSDAY

The monthly magazine of S Giles-in-Reading

11 February, 2021



SOUL OF HENRY WILSON BLANDY
This Brass is placed in commemoration of the earnest
and devoted service rendered by
Henry Wilson Blandy Esq. J.P.
as Vicar's Warden of S. Giles parish A.D. 1865 to 1894.
During which period this Church was restored in the year 1875
and the District Church of S. Luke's erected in 1885.
Towards the accomplishment of these important works
he not only zealously laboured, but in conjunction with his
wife Mrs. Jane Blandy most liberally contributed.
1894

In Defence of Temptation

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Parish News

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(Art by Jan Hearn)

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THE GUEST BIT:

The Clerical Antiquary

by Francis Young





Sandro Botticelli, The Temptation of Christ

First Things

Fr David



In Defence of Temptation

The story of The Temptations of Christ is always read on The First Sunday in Lent. It is a story of great significance in Christian history, precisely because it is of great significance in our pilgrimage of Faith - it sheds incredible light on the struggles we face as human beings.

Its important to note that the great teachers of the faith all agree that the temptations of Christ are our temptations. They are our temptations brought to a certain kind of clarity in Jesus Christ.

I know we usually have a negative view of temptation. But in truth, there is something altogether positive about the fact of temptations. They are a necessary feature of our humanity. How we understand and respond to the temptations in our souls is altogether crucial.

The great positive feature of temptation is that it serves to demonstrate what is good and true. The whole season of Lent is about being set free from our illusions, and delusions. And that's precisely what temptation is, whenever we are tempted - no matter how - we are being offered an illusion.

The temptations of Christ are our temptations brought to a kind of intensity of expression. They all speak to the question of our identity as God's children, our identity as the spiritual creatures who are made in God's image.

In the Gospels' sequence of events, the temptations of Christ all follow his baptism.

As Christians we are defined by our baptism. Our baptism involves renunciations and affirmations. There is our saying no, resoundingly, to the things which stand between us and God. There is our saying yes, resoundingly, to the things which God wants for us in our identity with him.

Who are we as human beings? That's the question raised with every temptation. What defines us? That's what Jesus faced in his three temptations in the wilderness.

'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.'

Will we be defined by our sensual appetites alone?

'If you are the Son of God' he said 'throw yourself down;

Will we be defined by the desire for vain glory and spectacle and show?

'I will give you all these' he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.'

Will we be defined by all that which denies and stands in opposition to God?

In short, the temptations of Christ are all about our identity as human beings. They are all about the denial or the

acceptance of our place in God.

All temptations - ultimately - are about the struggle within us, against appetite, vain glory and the desire for control.

I began by arguing that there is a positive aspect to our temptations - they help point us toward what is good and true.

There is and there must be the constant struggle to prove the goodness and the truth of God against the immediacy of our sensual appetites - as if we were merely a collection of orifices, in other words, merely consumers.

There is and there must be the constant struggle against the imagination of our hearts for vain glory, entertainment and show - as if everything was simply there for our amusement.

There is and there must be the constant struggle against the tyranny of our desire to be God - as if we were not creatures who find ourselves in a world which we did not make and do not rule.

What the temptations of Christ call into question - and it is a necessary question - is our identity with God in Christ. They call into question the truth of our humanity. Look at the temptations of Christ and see in them what belongs to your baptismal profession both in the renunciations and in the affirmations. Look at the temptations of Christ and see in them the question about your primary allegiances and about setting your love in order.



^{The} Churchwarden's Chest

News & Up-dates

Sue Mott



News for our observance of Lent.

I find it difficult to comprehend that Lent will be upon us next week as it was only last week that we joined on-line to celebrate a most memorable Candlemass. However, **Ash Wednesday** falls on the 17th of February when once again our observance will be on-line or do join with us via the telephone if you do not have internet access. Mass will be offered and streamed live at both 10.30am and 7.30pm. This will allow as many of the congregation as possible to be able to participate in a live act of worship. It will not be the same

as actually being present in Church but it will help us the engage with this holy season.

There will be a series of live acts of devotion on **Saturdays in Lent at 5.15pm** which will be streamed, on-line.

Saturday 20th February - Stations of the Cross

Saturday 27th February – The Rosary will be said

Saturday 6th March – Exposition of the Holy Sacrament

Saturday 13th March - Stations of the Cross

Saturday 20th March – The Rosary will be said

Saturday 27th March – Benediction

It will be very good for as many of us as possible to join with these devotional acts, on-line, on a Saturday evening.

A series of **Daily Meditations** will be sent to all of those who sign up for this (see our website) and for those who do not use the internet it is our intention to collect the meditations into a booklet and post them out so everyone can join in our collective observance. The meditations are by Bishop Robert Barron an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The **Feast of S Joseph** will be celebrated with a **Vigil Mass on Thursday 18th March at 7.30pm** which will be streamed live.

It is impossible to say at this time when we might be able to be back in church for public worship, but if there is any change in the directives we have been given we shall be in touch as soon as we hear. In the meantime do please join with us as much as you can with through our on-line offerings which continue to be Mass, Morning Prayer, Evensong, Compline, and the reading of a daily poem.



Tempus fugit

Last month I wrote about the repairs to the clock at S Giles and to my utter astonishment the clock was repaired and all the scaffolding removed before the month of January had passed. It just goes to show that sometimes things do work out well and in a timely fashion. I am delighted to announce that the north dial of the clock is showing the correct time and striking the quarters and the hours once more!

See to the left a photo taken of the scaffolding and if you look carefully you can just see the clock face above the top staging platform. It is quite a height and gives one a chance to look at a part of the church we rarely really look at. The cylindrical tower to the left of the picture is an ancient part of the church which contains a spiral stone staircase which twists its way up to the bells. The green door is not used today but one can enter from this external door at climb the stairs which is something I try not to do too often as it is very telling on the knees!



During the removal of the scaffolding I walked around the graveyard which is kept in a good state by the borough council as it is what is called a closed graveyard; that is it is not open for new burials. The views across this space are quite distracting in winter as the absence of leaves on the trees allows one to see aspects of the church building, the headstones and the surrounding buildings more clearly.

The photo to the right shows the old vicarage, today known as Fynmore House and now a private residence. There is also a photograph below looking north across the graveyard with what I have always considered an unusual tomb in that it is an upright square. You can see it just as the bough of the





evergreen tree sweeps down. The name on the tomb is John Dorset Esq but the moss is obscuring the whole inscription. I do not know anything of John Dorset but will try to find out if there is anything in our records. A close up of the side of the tomb is shown above.

Please do all take care in these difficult times and I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to join in our observance of Lent this year.

Sue

By Jan Hearn



Expositio Lectionis Dominicae



Fr Tomas

The Bright Sadness of Lent

The austere symbol of the ashes marks the period of Lent when we begin a new journey: a journey into ourselves to get ready for a worthy celebration of the Paschal mysteries. It is a time for contrition, a time to feel the weight of our sins: at the same time, it is an opportunity, a chance for a new beginning. Our Heavenly Father reaches out to us, once again, with patience which is literally divine – and invites us to follow his Son. We accompany Jesus, in him, through him, and at one with him, on his journey to Jerusalem.

During Lent, we prepare ourselves for the Mystery of Easter which sheds the light of hope upon the whole of our existence. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “the ashes are a sign reminding us of our status as created beings and inviting us to penance, to intensify our commitment to conversion so as to continue following the Lord”.

In the early Church, the main purpose of Lent was to prepare the catechumen, i.e. the newly converted Christians, for the sacrament of Baptism which was performed during the Paschal liturgy. But the meaning of Lent goes well beyond

baptism: though we are baptised, we constantly lose and betray the gift which we have received at Baptism. We keep turning our gaze away from God to the world and we sin again. Each Easter is therefore a return to our own Baptism, and Lent is our preparation for that return. It is something essential for all of us, clergy and laity alike.

Lent did not always have its current form: in the second half of the second century, two important Church fathers, Irenaeus of Lyons (in the province of Gaul – present day's France) and Tertullian (in North Africa) brought from their communities their testimonies of a preparatory fast commemorating the duration of Christ's time in the tomb; it was often a period of only one or two days. In the third century, Dionysius of Alexandria wrote of a fast of up to six days and the Byzantine historian Socrates (not to be confused with the great Greek philosopher) mentioned that the Christians in Rome at some point kept a fast of three weeks. Only at the Council of Nicea in AD 325, the length of Lent was fixed at forty days.

Lent should not be understood primarily as a number of formal rules and prescriptions in terms of what we should eat and drink, which tunes to sing during liturgy and which to avoid. The deep meaning of Lent is something without which all these prescriptions lose their meaning. Lent is, first of all, a certain state of mind, a time of renewal of our hearts so that we are better equipped for communion with our Creator. It is a period of a gradual, yet sometimes painful, liberation. The Eastern Church describes the true gift of Lent as a '*bright sadness*'. It is a bright sadness for it is filled with the gradual

rediscovery of a new light within us: if we let ourselves be led by the spirit of Lent, we will eventually experience a peaceful, mysterious liberation which illumines our lives and reaches its fullness in the glowing light of Easter. We are called to bathe in the brightness of God's forgiveness as we rediscover our desire to be closer to God, to recover our only real home.

Only if we understand Lent as a spiritual journey whose purpose is to transfer us from one spiritual state to another, we have a genuine understanding of the real gift behind it. True, there is also an ascetical part of Lent: an occasional physical hunger reflecting our spiritual hunger. This abstinence corresponds to the spiritual opening of our souls, to our 'opening up' to the approaching joy of Easter. Our fasting is the last and ultimate preparation for the great feast, the most decisive spiritual event in the history of the world, the mystery of Easter. It is no coincidence that, at all times, we should abstain from food for one hour before receiving the Holy Communion: it is an essential mode of our preparation for the Eucharistic banquet and the reflection of our Lenten practice. We are not alone: throughout Lent, the Church herself is more restrained in her liturgical celebrations: in a way, she is also fasting in her expectation of Christ who finally arrives in the wonderful Eucharist of Easter Sunday, as the resurrected Bridegroom.

Let us immerse together in the *'bright sadness'*, looking forward to the arrival of the Bridegroom. Let us duly prepare ourselves for a great feast, dressing our souls in immaculate, crisp garments, washing away the impurities of the world.

Bp Lorenzo Campeggio (1474-1539)



John Dearing



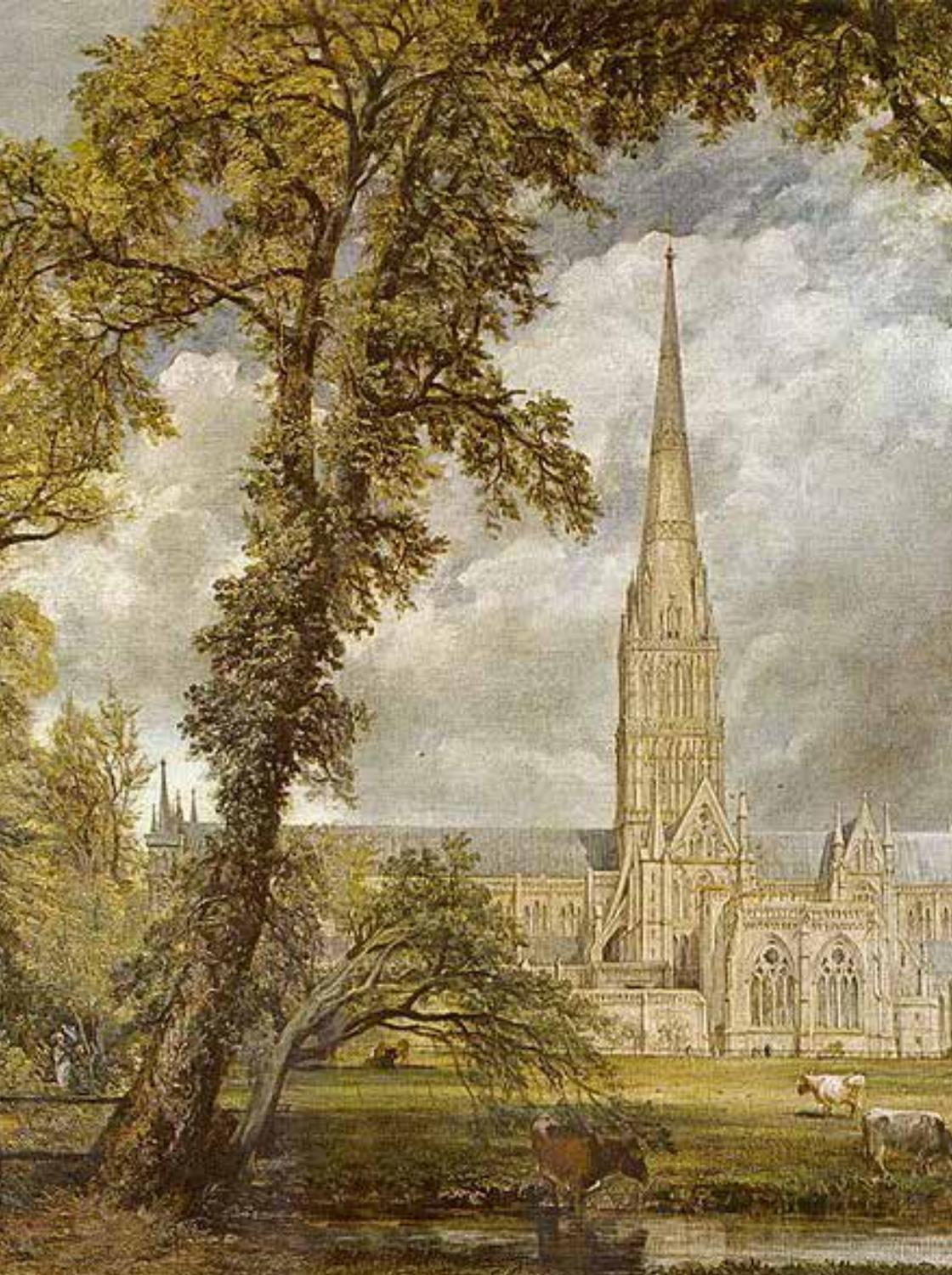
Under Salisbury

We all no doubt have our views about bishops. Those of a more presbyterian frame of mind may well regret that the Church of England continued with the order of bishops; while others will regard them as a vital necessity for the Church, safeguarding the Apostolic Succession. I expect this last view will prevail among our readers. For most of its history under the Reformed Catholic Church of England, Reading came under the bishops of Salisbury, only joining the Oxford diocese in 1836, with suffragan bishops following later in the century.

The last Bishop of Salisbury under the old regime was Lorenzo Campeggio (1474-1539) who combined the bishopric of Salisbury from 1524-34 with the office of papal legate and cardinal protector of England. He never resided in Salisbury

nor even visited his diocese. His main duty as legate was to try to sort out the problems over Henry VIII's first marriage, something he signally failed to do, ending up with him being sent off with a flea in his ear in 1530, Henry's parting gift being to inflict the ignominy of a search of his luggage by customs officers at Dover! It seems that the King suspected he might be smuggling out documents connected with the disgraced Cardinal Wolsey. However, Campeggio still collected the revenues of Salisbury until these were cut off in 1533 and the following year he was deprived for non-residence. Campeggio then achieved a sort of revenge as one of the papal commissioners who excommunicated Henry!

The first two bishops under Henry's supreme headship started as members of the reform party but later, either from fear or self-interest, went over to the conservatives that supported returning to Roman rule. Nicholas Shaxton (c.1485-1556) became Bishop in 1535. A Cambridge man, he had been one of the group of reformers that met at the White Horse Inn, along with Cranmer, Latimer and others. At first he continued to be to the forefront as a leader of the reformers, taking part in 1537 in an episcopal debate on the number of sacraments for those who maintained two against the traditional seven. However, in 1539, when the King's mood swings led him back to more 'papist' views, Shaxton, along with Latimer, resigned his bishopric and was briefly imprisoned for opposing Henry's Six Articles. On his release he returned to parochial duties for some six years until a further crackdown on heresy led to him being arraigned along with Anne Askew and two others for erroneous views on the nature of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Unlike



Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds, John Constable, 1823

Askew, Shaxton recanted and then allowed himself to be persuaded to preach against her at her martyrdom. Thereafter he seems largely to have adhered to the traditionalist viewpoint, returning to episcopal duties under Mary I as suffragan Bishop of Ely and taking part in the trial of those deemed to be heretics. He died in 1556.

His successor at Salisbury was John Salcot (c.1470-1557), also known as Capon, who seems to have been largely governed by self-interest. He is described by Gordon Crosse as 'an unscrupulous time-server' - an episcopal 'Vicar of Bray' one might say. He began his ecclesiastical career as a Benedictine monk and was successively abbot of St Benet's Hulme (Norfolk) from 1517 and Hyde (Winchester) from 1530. He was raised to the bishops' bench in 1534 with the Welsh see of Bangor, although he declined to visit his diocese on the premise that he could not speak Welsh. He then succeeded Shaxton at Salisbury in 1539 and remained there until his death in 1557 through thick and thin, happy to surrender his abbey at the Dissolution in 1539, content to follow Henry's vacillations between Romanism and reform, 'a zealous reformer' under Edward VI and prolific in sentencing Protestants to the stake under Mary I.

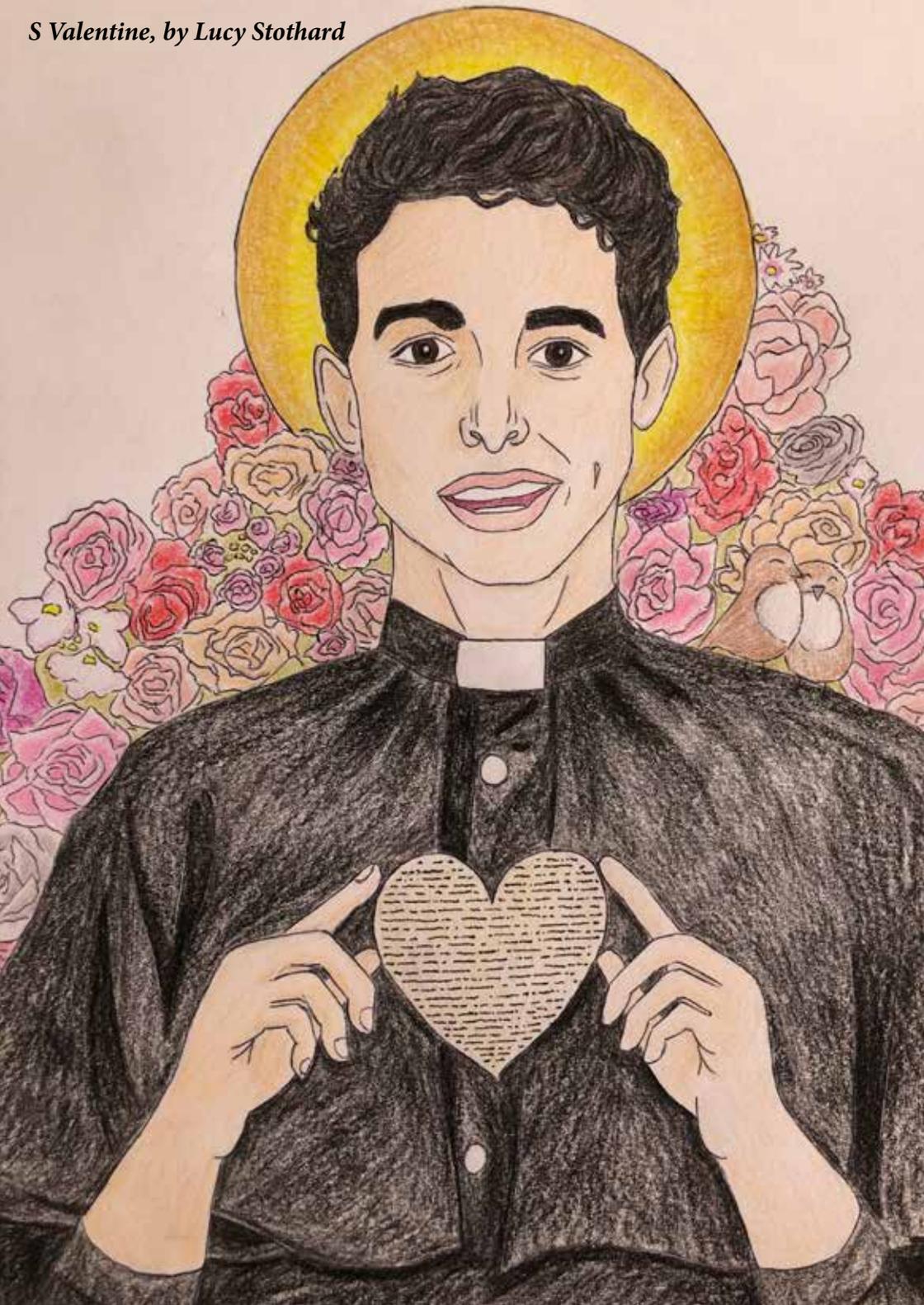
Not a very encouraging start, you might think, but over the years Reading has been governed by some much better and greater bishops- so this is a subject we might perhaps return to later...



Hyde Abbey.

Published 1 May 1783, By S. Hooper.

S Valentine, by Lucy Stothard



THE HOLY ONES

*Some reflections on a
Saint of the month.*

Lucy Stothard



Patron of Paying Attention

S Valentine

The feast of St. Valentine is readily celebrated by the secular world but has, ironically, become a source of heartache and frustration for many. My brief stint working in a coffee shop two years ago allowed me to befriend a number of young people into whose lives modern dating and relationships seemed to be bringing more trouble than joy. One of them was Nadia. She was twenty-three and stunningly beautiful. We had a lot of conversations while we were washing dishes and riding the Metro home after our ten hour shifts, most of which revolved around two things. The first was what she ought to be doing with her life (cabin crew was the dream. I told her to go for it). The second was her boyfriend, who treated her terribly (I told her to dump him). Part of the problem was that this young man had a tendency to act rather like the proverbial kid in a candy store when it came to women.

And, indeed, why wouldn't he? With the stigmas surrounding divorce, cohabitation and promiscuity removed, there is an ever-

decreasing societal pressure on young people to choose one person at all, much less commit to them for life. It's even a problem which has crept into some ecclesial circles, with divorce rife and one ostensibly Christian blogger recently attempting to make a Biblical case for hook-ups and polyamory.

When reading of Valentine's life, one cannot help but notice that there is no mention or evidence of him having been married.

It's a difficult situation, but not one out of which we can simply moralise ourselves. Nor can we blame it solely on the human tendency to place a high value on romantic love without understanding what it points to. We must understand what's going on at a deeper spiritual

level. The problem, I suggest, is one of fragmented attention.

The last fifty years has seen a boom in technology which has set a precedent of instant gratification and created the illusion of infinite choice in myriad areas (romance is merely one of them). The result has been a weakening of the human capacity for sustained attention. This is a problem because, as Simone Weil pointed out, attention is the foundation upon which the life of prayer – and union with God – rests.

Understanding this allows us to see lifelong, covenanted monogamy not as an outdated institution but as an exercise in the development and maintenance of one's attention span. It's a graced act of the will which has little to do with the feeling of being in love. In choosing

to love one's spouse even when, as C. S. Lewis puts it, 'each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be "in love" with someone else', the capacity for attention is strengthened, and contemplation finds a foundation upon which to rest.

Valentine of Rome was a third-century priest and Roman martyr whose life is steeped in myth (reliable historical sources are scant at best). One such myth holds that Valentine, in defiance of the emperor Claudius, secretly performed the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony for Christian couples, thus allowing the men to escape conscription into the pagan army. He is said to have cut hearts from parchment to remind the men of their vows and God's love, which birthed the tradition of exchanging hearts on his feast day. He is venerated as the patron of courtly love, young people and happy marriages.

When reading of Valentine's life, one cannot help but notice that there is no mention or evidence of him having been married himself; from this, we may suppose that he was celibate. That a celibate man should become the patron of romance may seem odd; however, it contains something prophetic if one has the eyes to see. If the purpose of monogamy is to cultivate attention while pointing toward the greatest of all romances, then monogamy can rightly be said to be the handmaiden of celibacy. The celibate life requires allowing God to captivate, and hold, one's full attention; it requires committing one's life to Love itself, regardless of distractions.

Valentine's Day, then, is a perfect opportunity for married Christians to find new depths of meaning in their vocation. Alternatively, for those who are dating but not being treated properly, it might just be a wonderful day to dump them.



The Guest bit

Francis Young

In defence of the clerical antiquary

The clerical antiquary is a dying species. There are plenty of contemporary clergy with degrees in Church History, and some notable academic church historians in holy orders, but there are few parochial clergy who devote themselves to local antiquarian pursuits in the manner of so many of their forebears.

To many – perhaps most – in the contemporary Church, it is self-evident that a member of the clergy spending a large proportion of their time researching local history and archaeology is deserting their duty. This is not what the clergy are for, we are told (although the clergy are increasingly pressed into roles their predecessors would never have dreamed were part of their ministry). Indeed, the stereotyped Georgian or Victorian clergyman who spent all his time in ‘secular’ pursuits such as collecting fossils or directing excavations is something of a figure of fun – people snigger at the thought of clergy who essentially used the ‘leisure’ afforded by their position to spend their time in research and study, rather than looking after their parishioners.

Yet is it time to reconsider this stereotype, and ask whether clerical antiquaries really were the workshy examples of ecclesiastical decadence they are so often taken to be?

Apart from those clergy who spent much of their time in antiquarian pursuits because their parishes were very small and there was not a lot else to do, many clergy who had been fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges saw an incumbency as an opportunity to continue research they had begun at the university. At a time when there was no such thing as a research degree, an incumbency was often the closest Georgian and Victorian England had to a funded opportunity for early career researchers. If we begrudge the fact that clergy used their time for research, we might well ask how else married men could have continued an academic career (at a time when fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges were still required to be celibate). For those without private means, virtually the only way to obtain a higher degree was through research undertaken in an ecclesiastical office.

Beyond the opportunities that an incumbency afforded for pursuing research that could not otherwise be supported, clerical antiquaries often made lasting contributions to the survival of their local churches that continue to resonate today. In many cases, churches are still loved and much visited because an earlier incumbent took the trouble to uncover that church's remarkable past. For every Victorian rector who disfigured his church with a half-baked neogothic 'restoration', there was another who uncovered layers of unappreciated

architecture and artefacts from beneath whitewash, ungainly box pews and teetering public galleries.

Furthermore, the antiquarian interests of most clerical antiquaries extended far beyond the church building, encompassing the history of the entire parish. Clergy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were often the only person in the parish with the level of education required to understand and make use of the sources of local history. Many made no glamorous discoveries, and their names are not remembered; but by laying the foundations of parish histories they put their communities on the map. They created a powerful sense of local identity, rooted in the historic landscape, in permanent monuments and in properly documented history, that was more lasting than mere civic or parochial pride.

In an age where many clergy are burdened by the care of those historic buildings whose significance the clerical antiquaries uncovered, some may ask with Jesus himself, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ (Luke 24:5). What does the study of the past have to do with the Gospel and the Christian faith?

We owe much of what we take for granted about England’s parish churches to the clerical antiquaries – including, of course, their dedications, most of which were lost at the Reformation and rediscovered or conjectured by Victorian incumbents with an antiquarian bent. And the parish is, arguably, a community extended across time as well as space; a little corner of the Communion of Saints, both living and dead. The parish owes a duty to the dead as well as the living – or, more accurately, a duty to the living to remind them what

they can learn from honouring the dead. This went without saying in the medieval parish, which was steeped in daily performative acts of commemoration, where the boundary between the influence of the living and the long dead became blurred in the demands of chantries, bedehouses and endowed masses.

Clerical antiquarianism arose out of the anxieties of the post-Reformation Church, where high churchmen were eager to demonstrate the rights of the Church against secular power and to show their continuity (albeit appropriately reformed and purified) with the medieval Church. Against the encroaching claims of hostile Puritan or downright irreligious squires, seventeenth-century clergy learnt the importance of knowing local history – especially such details as the extent of Church lands in the parish and the incumbent’s customary rights. In the eighteenth century this utilitarian approach to local history gave way to a broader appreciation of antiquities and the value of recording the past, before the nineteenth century brought its own ideas of revival and architectural (and even liturgical) restoration.

The clergy of today may well resent the clerical antiquaries of yesteryear for the apparently ‘easy’ lives they led as the incumbents of single-parish benefices; they may even feel they bear the burden of the clerical antiquaries’ discoveries about the architectural and historic significance of now cash-strapped churches, not to mention the burden imposed by the poor quality of some antiquarian ‘restorations’. These are not unreasonable complaints.

Yet perhaps there should be more reflection on the place of history and archaeology within Christian mission in the contemporary Church. We need look no further than the prologue to St Luke's Gospel to find historiography within the pages of Scripture itself, while the rediscovery of the Book of the Law in II Chronicles 34 and the words of God to Isaiah, 'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged' (Isaiah 51:1) might well provide inspiration to Christian antiquaries, archivists and archaeologists. Above all, however, the Acts of the Apostles are the foundation of the discipline of Church History, which is the history of Christian communities. In a sense, every Christian antiquary follows in the footsteps of St Luke – and there is no *prima facie* reason why the story of the Christian community in Little Snoring should matter less than the story of the Church in Corinth.

Christianity is a historical faith, rooted in a narrative about past events (even if those events are, in some sense, occurring in eternity). The Church of England, perhaps more than any other part of Christ's Church, is compelled by its complex history to negotiate a narrative that requires a sophisticated understanding of Church History and its methodologies. Few dispute the value of Church History to the training of the clergy as a general principle; but perhaps it is time we examined more closely the role that the local antiquarianism of the parochial clergy played (and, in a handful of cases, still plays) in building up Christian communities.

Dr Francis Young is a historian specialising in the history of religion and supernatural belief, with a particular interest in the history of England.