

### Greetings!

I hope this newsletter finds you well. The rain has certainly found us well enough last night and this morning, though I'm sure any of us with a garden will look gladly on our parched lawns as they drink up the moisture! As ever, I find myself ruminating on the parallels here with the spiritual life too (it's practically my job after all) – read on to the end for a little reflection.

Otherwise, it leaves me to update you with a couple of goings on in the life of the Parish as summer draws to a close. Here's what's in the spotlight:

- Parish service with Baptisms | this Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August | 10:30am at St Peter & St Paul
- Deanery Confirmation | Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September | 7pm at All Saints, Old Town
- Parish Passions Project and data audit | Your chance to take control of how we use your data and empower you to serve



## **Baptism Sunday!**

### Sunday 31st August | 10:30 service at St Peter & St Paul

This Sunday we are thrilled to host another joint parishwide service, this time at St Peter & St Paul. During the service we will be baptising two of the brilliant chaps from

our community: David (St John's) and Conrad (P&P). We'll be making quite the splash as these will be our first ever full immersion baptisms (with the help of a portable hot tub).

To top of the celebrations and to maximise on our time together as a Parish, we will also be sharing lunch together afterwards. See you then!

NB: there will be no service at St John's this Sunday. If you require any assistance getting to P&P, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

## **Deanery Confirmations**

# Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September | 7pm at All Saints, Old Town

There's a small window of opportunity here for anyone that would like to be confirmed.



Confirmation is a special church service in which a person confirms the promises that were made when they were baptized. If you were baptized at a christening when you were a child, your parents and godparents made these promises on your behalf. As a young person or adult, you

may be ready to affirm these promises for yourself and commit your life to following Jesus Christ. At a confirmation service, you make these promises for yourself. Your friends and family as well as the local Christian community will be there to promise to support and pray for you.

Our diocesan Bishop +Martin will be taking the service, during which he will lay his hands on your head and ask God's Holy Spirit to give you the strength and commitment to live God's way for the rest of your life.

**If you would like to be confirmed, please contact me ASAP.** I will hold a couple of confirmation classes the week leading up to the confirmations for anyone interested.

## Parish Passions Project

#### Your chance to take control of how we use your data and empower you to serve

The Parish Passions Project is now live! Please click the link below to take part.

Firstly, we want to make sure that we have all your information up to date, this includes your contact and other demographic details that will help us to better understand the make-up of our parish, communicate more effectively, and enable mission.

Secondly, we want to find out what you are passionate about. By doing this we're looking for patterns of passions and people, to then ponder a plethora of projects that will positively promote the potency and power of our parish mission.

So before I get too carried away and 'P' all over the place, please click the link below to fill out the form. It will probably take between 5-10 minutes to complete, and you can include as much or as little information as you feel comfortable sharing.

Parish Passions Project

That's all for now. Read on for a little reflection and a prayer.



I hope you have a great weekend.

Grace & Peace,

Toby

Rev Tobias J Lancaster
Priest in Charge
St John's Hollington, with St Peter & St Paul

### Reflection:

The rain this morning signalled a change in the season. The air is already a little cooler, the nights already drawing in a little sooner. This has been a hot summer, one of the hottest on record. The ground is dry, the grasses parched. In our house we've been playing the balancing

act all parents of young children face during the summer holidays; squeezing in work around entertaining children, getting feet measured, buying school uniforms, responding to a few more emails, doing another shift here and there. Even for someone in my position, nurturing my spiritual life gets squeezed at this time of year. I find myself at the end of this summer hot summer feeling a little dry.

Our spiritual lives can at times feel like arid wastelands, lacking nourishment, perhaps devoid of a sense of God's presence and filled with only a longing for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Ironically, the experience of God's apparent *absence* has been an essential part of Christian history from the beginnings of the Church, it's almost like a rite of passage. One might be tempted to question if faith that has not been forged in the fires of doubt and spiritual drought, is really genuine faith at all.

I'm reminded of one of my favourite novels, *Silence* by the Japanese Catholic author Shusaku Endo which was adapted for film by Martin Scorsese back in 2016 (spoilers ahead). Set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the book follows a young Jesuit priest from Portugal – Father Rodrigues – who travels to Japan to investigate reports that his former mentor has abandoned the Christian faith. The book sees Rodrigues coming to terms with the horrendous persecution of the "hidden Christians" in some of Japan's poorest communities. Rodrigues, determined to not follow the same path as his former mentor, tries his hardest to live up to the sufferings of Christ, staunchly refusing to abandon his faith even when it exacerbates the persecution of his communities. But it is only when Rodrigues stops trying, when he ceases to hold on to his piety, when he admits his dryness, when he succumbs to his weakness, and indeed ultimately abandons his faith to save his followers, that he paradoxically becomes most Christlike. After following in his mentor's footsteps, settling permanently in Japan, Rodrigues comes to this realisation towards the end of his life. Faith is not pure determination to believe against the odds, faith is admitting your dryness, your weakness, and recognising that your thirst will only be slaked by Christ faithfulness.



(Liam Neeson as Fr Ferreira - Fr Rodrigues mentor - in Martin Scorsese's 2016 movie adaptation of Silence by Shusaku Endo)

Perhaps this is where you find yourself at the moment? Perhaps like me, your spiritual life is maybe lacking the lustre it had before a busy summer. Or perhaps you are completely spiritually drained, dry as a bone. If that is so, congratulations, you have hit the foundations of faith. Dry bones are our God's specialism (just read Ezekiel).

In her personal diaries – published after her death – Saint Mother Theresa claimed to have had only one experience of the personal presence of God as a young woman. The rest of her life she lived in a spiritual desert longing for God's presence - and yet look what she achieved.

Soon enough, the rains will come. Soon might be as soon as next week, or, like Father Rodrigues and Mother Theresa, "soon" might be the life we live after we have died. Either way it will be soon enough. When the rain pours after a hot summer, the ground takes time to absorb it. At first the moisture sits on top, before it slowly starts to seep through. This Sunday, as we baptise Conrad and David, you can allow the waters in which you were baptised to flow over you once more. Take the time to allow the rain to come, to pour, to settle, and to seep in.

I'll leave you with this prayer by the great African-American Christian mystic (and mentor to Martin Luther King Jr.) Howard Thurman:

Open unto me - light for my darkness.

Open unto me - courage for my fear.

Open unto me - hope for my despair.

Open unto me - peace for my turmoil.

Open unto me - joy for my sorrow.

Open unto me - strength for my weakness.

Open unto me - wisdom for my confusion.

Open unto me - forgiveness for my sins.

Open unto me - tenderness for my toughness.

Open unto me - love for my hates.

Open unto me - Thy self for my self.

Lord, lord, open unto me!

Till next time. Amen.