

In Touch *with The Grail*

On a beautiful golden Saturday at the end of September the newly formed GP Southern Group gathered for its second meeting in the cottage at the Hermitage in Winchester. The meeting was a preparation for the Year of Mercy, declared by Pope Francis and beginning on 8 December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. In announcing this special year, Pope Francis called mercy 'a wellspring of joy'. Carl and Judith Schmidt led the meeting with Carl explaining the meaning of mercy.

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Pope Francis has proclaimed a Holy Year of Mercy and dramatically signalled what *mercy* is by licensing all priests to forgive the 'reserved' sin of having or procuring an abortion (a reserved sin is a grave sin requiring the direct authority of the bishop for absolution). This action well illustrates the traditional meaning of mercy: *forbearance, by a superior, from executing punishment due by justice*.

OLD TESTAMENT

In the Bible we find two notions of justice. The earlier equates justice with the exact application of the Law of Moses, and morality with obedience to the Law. Later, under the influence of the Prophets, the idea of mercy comes in to mitigate the inflexibility of legal justice. Al-

ready in the 10th century BC we observe the beginnings of mercy as mitigated justice in the story of David's murder of Uriah (*II Sam 12*), for which he deserves death. Through the prophet Nathan, God tells David that he will not die, but he will lose his son by Bathsheba.

The story illustrates a transitional stage between the rigour of the earlier application of divine law and a later one that is less severe. The Prophets after the 8th century stress the importance of active mercy, not just ritual observance and connect doing *sedeq* 'justice' with showing *hesed* 'mercy' (*Mic 6:8*).

THE PSALMS

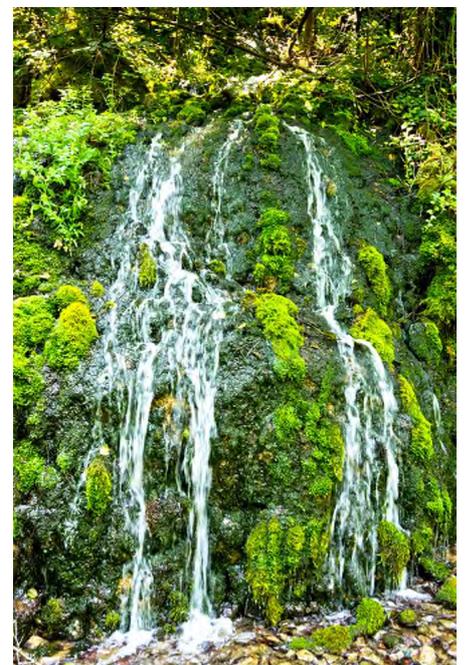
Prophetic influence is strong in the Psalms, which are full of pleas for God's mercy. An example is Ps 25:10, where the Revised Standard Version employs its usual translation 'steadfast love' for the Hebrew word *hesed*, rendered in earlier translations as 'mercy': 'All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies'. The Psalmist sees 'keeping the covenant' as a condition of receiving mercy, but at the same time acknowledges that one who breaks the law may nonetheless hope for pardon from a merciful God (*Ps 25:11,18*).

The New Testament in due

course spells out that those who receive mercy are obliged to show it in turn: 'For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy' (*Js 2:13*). The 'quality of mercy' is an element of true justice: 'It is an attribute to God himself; 'And earthly power doth then show liketh God's / When mercy seasons justice' (*The Merchant of Venice IV.i. 193-5*).

Portia's great speech on mercy echoes the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. The third and fourth Beatitudes deal with the related gifts ('blessings') of justice and mercy: 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Mt 5:6-7). These, it is worth noting, are the only two of the beatitudes which are self-recompensing or 'reciprocal', ie. the 'reward' for exercising the 'gift' is the gift itself.

Now, these Beatitudes may only say that the just and the merciful



MERCY – WELLSPRING OF JOY

will receive justice and mercy from other people, but the clear implication in context is that they will also receive it from God.

DIVINE GIFT & VIRTUE

These examples from Shakespeare and Scripture show 'mercy' in its normal meaning as 'forbearance from applying justice in its strictness.' Mercy *is* a divine 'gift'. but it is also a virtue of right reason, which is predicated of an all-wise, all-knowing God. It is to be distinguished from pity or compassion, which originate not in reason but in the feelings.

Pity is a feeling of sorrow for another's affliction, *compassion* a sharing in his or her suffering. And while there is always a gap between the one feeling pity and the one *pít-ied*, with compassion there is something like identification. Thus we think of Our Lady at the foot of the cross feeling not pity for her Son but deep and true compassion. He in his turn shows the Repentant Thief human compassion and pity but also divine mercy and forgiveness.

Pity often prompts and motivates mercy, but the difference between the two is well brought out in the healing incident at Jericho (*Mt 20:29-34*). The blind men cry out 'Lord have mercy' (*Eleison Kyrie*), in the very words we still use in the penitential rite at Mass. The implication is that they accept the current Jewish belief, which Jesus rejected, that afflictions like blindness are the result of one's own or one's parents' sin and think themselves guilty and requiring mercy. But Jesus does not forgive their guilt, he heals their blindness; and he does so 'in pity' (the original Greek word has the strong sense of 'deeply moved within').

So here we see mercy as *action*, with pity as *motive*. This is often the pattern of behaviour evinced by Christians and non-Christians alike in the face of afflictions, and St Augustine goes so far as to identify mercy with compassion: 'What is mercy [*miseriordia*] except a certain fellow-feeling [*compassio*] for

another's affliction which compels us to come to his aid if we can? (*City of God ix:5*). Augustine can do this because in the Latin language of his day the senses 'pity' and 'mercy' had become closely associated in *miseriordia*.

THE DEMAND OF MERCY

In the concrete situations of the present day, strict justice may not demand, for instance, that Britain should accept refugees from the Syrian conflict, but mercy does. The motive for that mercy is pity and, as the images of the drowned Syrian child showed, compassion - our feeling that we should come to their aid if we can and our fellow-feeling that teaches us how in changed circumstances this *aliena miseria* 'wretchedness of another' could be our own.

Judith continued the exploration of the meaning of mercy in our lives today, referring to the Pastoral Letter from all the Bishops of England and Wales and Leaflet in September and from the Proclaim '15 follow up materials.

The Pastoral Letter stated that the 'mercy of God is God's love in action, reaching out to every person... As we understand the depth of God's never-failing mercy towards us, then we are freed to offer the same mercy to those around us..' while the Proclaim leaflet, using the parable of the lost sheep, suggests that we are often more concerned with the ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold than with those who need to be aware of God's mercy.

In the discussion that followed we considered the ways in which we as individuals make God's love



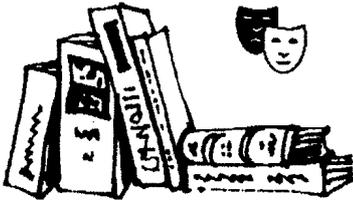
and mercy shown to those we meet. We need to start with ourselves and be aware of the influence we have, and considered whether it is sometimes easier to form a group to discuss the issue rather than in the words of Pope Francis 'cultivate in ourselves approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, warmth and a welcome that is non-judgmental'.

Carl & Judith Schmidt
Grail Partners

A cry for mercy from Psalm 25 (24)

Remember your mercy,
Lord
and the love you have
shown from of old.
Do not remember
the sins of my youth.
In your love remember me
The Lord is good and up-
right...
His ways are faithfulness
and love
for those who keep his cove-
nant and will.
Lord,
for the sake of your name
forgive my guilt,
for it is great....
My eyes are always on the
Lord
for he rescues my feet
from the snare.
Turn to me and have mercy
for I am lonely and poor.

Grail translation 1963



What's New?

SOUL WHISPERS

Edwina Gateley

Gateley Press \$15.00

ISBN 978-1-4951-4143-0

I am not sure if this book is available to buy in the UK as I could not find it on Amazon. In USA it's price was \$15.00.

In the introduction to her book, Edwina Gateley writes: 'They tell me that poetry is not the most popular media. Maybe that is its beauty – it speaks to the soul and is the language of the soul'.

As many readers will know, Edwina is a missionary, retreat giver, prophet and spiritual writer. She has written many books and, for me, she is someone whose writing does indeed speak straight to my soul.

In this beautiful little book, written in poetic form, we are given short reflections on all sorts of topics and emotions and observations. You can pick it up and at random find something to ponder or meditate on, something as simple as a spider or boxes.

If you have been inspired by Edwina's writings before, then here is another little gem.

Mary Grasar
Grail Community Member

MY JOURNEY SO FAR

Andrew White

Lion Books £10.49

ISBN 0745970222

Andrew White is a man of great charm and energy, whose personal suffering has not deflected him from his role as one of the world's most trusted mediators and reconcilers.

As a child and young man growing up in London, Andrew set his heart on working in the field of anaesthetics, an ambition he achieved, but later found himself called into Anglican ministry. He has since had a considerable role in the work of reconciliation, both between Christian and Jew and between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslim.

As Vicar of St George's Baghdad, the only Anglican church in Iraq, he leads a team providing food, health care, and education on a major scale and often in dire circumstances.

Despite the pain from multiple sclerosis, he has nevertheless been able to mediate between opposing extremes. He is frequently involved in hostage negotiations, and played a key role in ending the siege at the Church of the Nativity in Jerusalem.

He has had close personal dealings with Yasser Arafat and Pope John Paul II. He has been kidnapped, lives in constant danger, and ISIS is a growing threat. He is trusted by those who trust very few.

This is an inspiring book and well worth a read.

from Parish Pump

HOUSE IN THE SUNFLOWERS

Ruth Silvestre

Allison & Busby £8.99

ISBN 0749008385

For easy reading evoking the sounds and smells of Languedoc, you could not do better than this book. It is also available as an e-book, which is how I read it.

Ruth Silvestre operatic singer and actress, and her husband are looking for a property in the Lot-et-Garonne region of France. They stumble across a dilapidated house – Bel-Air de Grezelongue – at the end of a track which, in spite of being in obvious need of renovation, appeals to all their senses and they fall in love with it. The rest of the book is the love story and how they gradually begin to understand

the customs and history of the local area and adapt their lives to the close knit local community.

Next door is a delightful farmer and his family from whom Ruth and her husband find that the house has a history and that their neighbours are keen to help them in any way they can – primarily by providing food and meals that one can only dream of. The smells of French country cooking leap off the page.

Over several years, coming and going from London, and with help from all sorts of local workmen – who all seemed to work hard and quickly – the house became habitable and more and more loved. Describing in great detail all the work and renovations done over a number of years, it is very easy to imagine what it must be like.

Ruth Silvestre is able to describe the countryside, towns, villages and markets, local villagers and the numerous celebrations with home-grown wines and preserved plums to mention just a couple, with amazing clarity. You feel as if you have taken part your self.

This is the first of a trilogy and, having read many books by people who have embraced the French way of life, I can say in all honesty that this is by far the most enjoyable and realistic. Perfect for holidays or simply an engaging book to read in which to lose oneself.

Elizabeth Willis

ON DUTY WITH THE QUEEN

Dickie Arbiter with Lynne Barrett-Lee

Blink Publishing £14.99

ISBN-10: 1905825862

Dickie Arbiter, a regular on LBC radio became a royal correspondent before becoming the Queen's press secretary. It was because of what I knew, that I was sure that this book was not a kiss and tell and full of all the court gossip. And I was right.

If you have ever wondered about the workings of the royal household – from everyday organisation to national events and foreign visits - this

book will intrigue you. It is fascinating and informative, written with respect and regard to the royals.

As a press secretary, Dickie Arbiter had access to the inner circle and workings of the Royal Household. His time covered the divorce of Charles and Diana and also Diana's death and they are dealt with professionally in spite of having to deal with the media circus surrounding these events.

When you read about one or other royal making a foreign visit you don't realise the length of time in planning the visit and all the details they involve. No wonder they are an great expense, but necessarily so.

I found this an easy-to-read and hard-to-put down book which was written with openness and honesty, by someone who experienced and enjoyed this once-in-a-lifetime job and service to the crown.

Mary Howard

THE BESOTTED MOTHER

God fell in love with us
before we were born,
gently tracing each cell
in their billions,
and imagining with delight
our becoming
as we burst thro'
the cosmic dance of stars.
God surely smiling
and delighting
in this wondrous
and amazing creativity!
And as we emerged
into consciousness,
beholding all that moved
and danced and played
on and around
our planet home,
God wept
in joy and delight –
overcome by our beauty
and dreaming
of our unique possibilities –
like any besotted Mother.

*Edwina Gateley
from Soul Whispers*

ENABLING THINGS TO HAPPEN

Earlier in the year, the Grail Society (Waxwell) UK announced the good news that they were in a position to offer small grants, to parishes and other organisations who are wanting to develop something in line with Grail outreach and aims. These groups are generally small and, as a result, will often find difficulty in accessing funding.

Two of the groups who have benefited from this new scheme have written an account of how their grant is being used – one in Sheffield and one near Nuneaton.



PARISH RESOURCES



St Marie's, Sheffield's Catholic Cathedral, in the centre of the city, is a vibrant, multi-cultural church community. Parishioners come from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The hall is situated adjacent to the Cathedral, and is regularly used for coffee after masses, parish socials, sacramental preparation (eg Baptisms, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, etc) and other courses for developing/deepening faith. It is also where Children's Liturgy is held every week. It is also used by community groups

such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Life and so on.

We applied to The Grail Society for funds to improve the faith development resources that we can make available to parishioners and other visitors to the Hall. We also needed parish display boards to invite more parishioners to get involved in the life of the parish.

As a result of the grant from the Grail our Children's Liturgy group now has a beautiful oak stand to hold the Gospel - a vast improvement on being propped up against a chair. We also have a hand-painted crucifix for children's liturgy, showing Jesus holding a lamb in his arms. We have had lots of discussions about that lamb.

We have also purchased 50 children's laminated mass cards so far, so that when our children are in church they can follow what is going on, and join in. As young worshippers 'in training', this has really helped them to engage more with what goes on during Mass.

We now have a superb bookcase in the Hall, with space for 400 faith books! Some children's faith books have already been donated, and we are currently appealing for more before we go out and purchase additional ones.

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rently appealing for more before we go out and purchase additional ones.

Our two new display boards, are soon to be put up. These will be pivotal in our parish communication going forward, particularly around encouraging volunteers to step forward and become more involved in parish life (eg as Catechists, or to help with the SVP; to come along on parish pilgrimages, etc). And finally, we have some pretty sage green waterproof tables clothes for all the tables in the Hall, and some brightly coloured beanbags for the children to sit on while they read books. What a colourful, warm welcome we can now offer!

We will continue to develop the Hall as a resource centre, and to make it as interesting, informative and welcoming as we can.

Although well-used, we would like to create even more opportunities for people and groups to use the Hall. Under discussion at the moment is how it can be used by Prayer groups, support groups and social opportunities.



The Cathedral Church of St Marie, Sheffield, was granted £605.90 to improve general parish amenities, particularly for the children. Margaret Smith, Grail Partner, sponsored the application.

Candida Calvert, PPC Member
& Lead Children's Liturgist



CATECHESIS

We have been part of the parish of St Francis of Assisi, Bedworth for two years. We have no priest but one comes from a neighbouring parish to celebrate the sacraments while

the Sisters of Providence assure a presence in the presbytery.

We soon became aware of the age profile of the parish and noticed the absence of young families and young people. So we began to build up relationships with the primary school and the few young people we saw met whilst an ambitious scheme developed in our minds.

Receiving a grant from the Grail enabled us to move our project along to the position that we are in today where we now have a good number of young families and it feels like things are beginning to happen.

We used the grant to buy a video projector and a laptop which are now at the service of the parish. As a result we have been able to use them in many different projects within the parish. Over the last two years we have used them to help to deliver RCIA talks and have seen 18 people (mostly young parents) received into the Church. We have also used them to train readers and Eucharistic ministers and to give talks to parents of children being prepared for the Sacraments.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Our young people, in particular, have benefited from this equipment since they have been able to use them to receive training from the Diocese enabling them to complete the Diocesan youth leadership scheme, VITAL.

Recently, they have started a new youth initiative 'Christian Life Movement', through which they reflect on their lives as Catholics and how they live the Gospel in their



daily lives. The equipment gives them the ability to find interesting and dynamic resources on the internet and to use them in t

he talks and sharing in which they engage. It also helps them to produce talks and materials for others.

In the next few months the young people from the parish will be publicising the forthcoming Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes and the World Youth Day in Poland. The equipment will give them the confidence and professionalism that they need to deliver their message. They will also be putting it to very good use as they help to train the next cohort of young leaders in our parish!

Let us recall the words of Pope Francis in an address on World Communications Day:

'The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.'

St Francis of Assisi parish in Bedworth was granted £850 for a laptop and projector to improve catechesis. Their request was sponsored by Judith Schmidt, Grail Partner.

REACHING OUT



Grail Society Grant Scheme

GRAIL NEWS



THE LOSS OF A GREAT FRIEND

Jessica Dorothea Grace Garety
1918 -2015

Jessica (Jessie) was a great friend, supporter and promoter of the Grail. Some years ago, she and her husband Hugh, moved from Mill Hill in North London to Emsworth in Hampshire where they were very happy for a number of years.

Jessie and Hugh were Grail Partners. They brought up a large family and took part in Family Weeks at Waxwell and stories abounded about what the children got up to whilst there. Jessie followed their careers and was particularly willing to share both their successes and problems. She was also a marriage guidance counsellor.

Hugh was an accountant and a Scot. He 'did' the books of the Grail Community for as long as I can remember, until his retirement before they moved to Emsworth.

Jessie and Hugh were great entertainers. They loved to hold dinner parties and over the years most of the Grail community were invited. They had a wide circle and variety of friends and particularly enjoyed introducing the Grail to new parish priests, or priests who were just visiting locally. Sometimes it was to in-

teresting people who had crossed their path. It was with Jessie and Hugh that the Grail met John Main OSB who opened a new area of work for the Grail – that of introducing silent meditation to numerous people. It These events were happy and enjoyable

A laden table, good conversation and Hugh's home made bread. (*see adjoining column*)

As time went on, Jessie and Hugh became less able to attend Grail or Partner functions but they kept in touch. The photo above was taken about 3 years ago when Dorothy and Norman Brookes rented a cottage in Winchester and, as Jessie only lived in Emsworth a Partner day was made of the occasion. From left to right can be seen Philip Hayllar, Jessie, John Boocock, Kate Boocock, Dorothy Brookes (behind), Rose Hayllar and Norman Brookes.

Always a very generous person, Jessie would visit us at Christmas laden with all sorts of goodies which were always much appreciated. When we moved to Winches she continued this tradition, latterly accompanied Philippa.

Jessie never really recovered from the death of her beloved Hugh, some years ago. She had many friends and was well supported by her local parish and it was only latterly that she went into care in St Mary's House, Brighton, where she was eventually very happy. It belongs to the Cross and Passion Benedictines and provided Jessie with all the spiritual help she required. Right to the end she kept her enjoyment of life and was ever ready to face new challenges.

Grail Partners and Grail Community will miss her. May she rest in peace and be reunited with Hugh.

HUGH'S HOME-MADE BREAD

If you are baking bread today you will almost certainly use fast-action dried yeast which goes straight into the flour.

Before this, people used compressed bakers yeast; and before that, yeast from a brewery. Earlier still, they made it from all sorts of ingredients, including mashed potatoes. It was, indeed, a chancy business to bake bread, because the yeast might or might not work. Many potential bakers still have the fear that their efforts will go wrong, so they don't try.

Your baking needn't go wrong, and, indeed, it will go very well if you use this recipe of Hugh Garety's.

Do other Partner husbands bake?



1.5 kilos strong wholemeal flour

1 pkt dried yeast

1 teaspoon salt

7 fluid oz sunflower oil

2 dessert spoons black treacle dissolved in 1.5 pints of tepid water

Mix flour, yeast and salt in a large basin.

Add the oil and stir well.

Rub the mixture until it resembles bread- crumbs.

Pour treacle & water into the mixture and stir until it is absorbed.

Knead the mixture to form a soft dough which can be lifted out of the bowl in one piece, leaving the bowl clean.

Divide into 4 pieces and put each into a greased tin.

Cover the tins and leave in a warm place until the dough nearly doubles its height.

Bake in a pre-heated oven at 400⁰ (200°, No. 6) for 45 minutes.

Take out of the tins and cool on a rack.

This is a really good loaf.

If you are pressed for time, then instead of rubbing the oil into the flour, warm it up with the water and the treacle.

As a variant, you can substitute 1lb of rolled oats for the same amount of flour.

from an archive copy of 'Exchange'
Philippa Craig

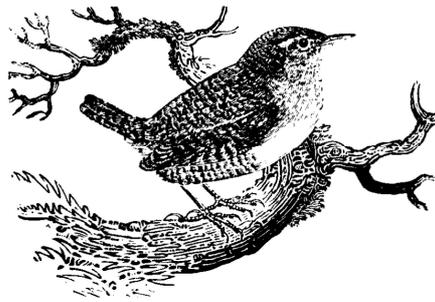
Thank you

'Each time I receive 'In Touch' I intend to write a word of my appreciation of it. Having just read No. 141 I am writing immediately mainly because of the thought-provoking synopsis of 'The Face of Mercy'. The front page article has always been very interesting and often inspiring to me.

'This week is Refugee week in Australia and I am involved in the settling of humanitarian refugees in North Queensland, one of the geographical regions for refugee resettlement. This means that a service provider here has a contract with the Government to carry out all the services required. I am President and volunteer of that Provider here and since 2011 more than 600 refugees have been settled in this region.

'Australia does not have a good reputation for its response to this desperate situation. However, there is plenty of advocacy happening by organisation and individuals to address our hard-heartedness.'

Sheila Hawthorn
Member of the Australian Grail



Dear Readers

As I write this, we await the final decision as to whether or not the UK should join France in attacking ISIS. It is difficult to know what is the best thing to do but I can't help thinking that with the downing of the Russian jet the world is becoming an even more dangerous place.

There is also the problem of what to do about the huge number of migrants still trying to get into the EU. Should we just let them all in? Is it right that countries as closing their borders? However charitable one feels about the whole situation, it is understandable that the sheer numbers involved is frightening.

The Year of Mercy, announced by Pope Francis begins on 8 December. According to 'The Tablet' some dioceses are really taking the idea to heart and have created a Holy Door – like the one which will be opened by the Pope in St Peters' to open the year – and will be taking it to visit the various parishes to hold a similar service there and to encourage people to 'avail themselves in a particular way of God's merciful indulgence so that the time of grace offered by this Jubilee year will make it possible for many of God's sons and daughters to take up once again the journey to the Father's house'.

The cottage has been used quite a lot in recent months. A couple of people came for some quiet time, various friends have spent some holiday time here and, currently, we have the Sisters from Minsk in Belarus. They are here for the Christmas Market where they have

a stall selling some of their wares – icons and glass ware. This will be the third year they have been and they appreciate being in warm accommodation and quite independent. They find the dampness of our weather the most difficult part of the exercise!

The outside of the house has been painted and, in the process, it was discovered that some of the windowsills were rotting. Of course, it meant extra expense and a lot of extra noise with the cutting and replacing of the wooden sills! It is all complete now, except for the French window in the Office which leads into the garden. We are waiting until next year to get that seen to.

Jackie came back from holiday with a broken arm which incapacitated her somewhat. The plaster was very heavy which made it more uncomfortable. However, fortunately, it set and plaster removed. After some prescribed exercises, her arm now seems as good as new.

The Grail Partners held their weekend at Launde Abbey, near Oakham. Esther and Grace took part and both found it most interesting and stimulating weekend. One of issues discussed was Mercy and Pity led by Judith Carl Schmidt – *see first article*.

We have purchased a new freezer – an upright one. The one we were using was inherited from the previous owner of The Hermitage and was a chest freezer and quite elderly. How lovely it is to be able to take food out, or put food in, without bending double and having to heave carrier bags out before finding what you are looking for. It is also frost free – the biggest bonus!

Well, it is almost Christmas. The community here wish you all every blessing and let us all pray for peace at this unsettling time.

Sincerely,
Mary

Many of the photographs used in this issue are from SHUTTERSTOCK

ILLUMINATED BY STARLIGHT



After the announcement a few weeks ago that flowing water seems to exist on Mars, and the earlier discovery that the Earth has a bigger and older near-twin, Kepler-452b, frissons of excitement rippled across the land. Maybe there is life out there after all! And, if there is, what would the implications be for planet Earth? It is a time for imagination, for a courageous trust in Creation.

'We belong to a reality greater than our own', writes Diarmuid O'Murchu MSC, in his 2002 book *Evolutionary Faith*, 'and it is now time to embrace the cosmic and planetary context within which our life story and the story of all life unfolds.'

NEW HORIZONS

For sure, our current understanding of religion, particularly of Christianity, would be seriously challenged. Fr Thomas O'Meara OP, in his wonderful little book *Vast Universe*, wrote that 'the possibility of extra-terrestrial life becoming part of our world, whether in theory or reality, makes us think differently about who we are and about what it means to be intelligent. It implies new horizons for the future. New theologies await. Even a revelation believed to come from God would be expanded.'

Theologian Karl Rahner wrote: 'Today the Christian is aware of living on a tiny planet that is part of a system of a particular sun, which itself belongs to a galaxy with 300 million stars, and is many thousands of light years broad. In this cosmos of unimaginable size ... [we believe that] the eternal Logos of God who drives forward these billions of galaxies became a human being on this

small planet which is a speck of dust in the universe.'

We wonder what creation stories those other inhabited 'specks of dust' might have. Would they include a Fall? And if not would an incarnation still be central to their stories? God, of course, can be present on other planets in a million ways. Incarnation and redemption are not unique to Earth. Nor does the possibility of a different kind of incarnation to ours diminish the unique importance of our Christian story. We believe that the risen Christ, the cosmic Christ, has the supreme role of saving and completing the entire material universe. And we continue to wonder.

Paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ wrote: 'All that I can entertain is the possibility of a multi-aspect incarnation which would be realised on all the stars ...' In her poem 'Christ in the Universe', Alice Meynell imagines this 'multi-aspect incarnation'. She pictures an extra-terrestrial gathering of the civilisations of countless constellations, telling stories about their incarnations and eternities, listening to 'a million alien Gospels, in what guise He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear'.

*O, be prepared my soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The myriad forms of God those stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them
a Man.*

These reflections draw us into a deeper exploration of our own faith story, and especially, the meaning of an Original Sin. Might

we be the only inhabited star to have disappointed our Creator? There have been theologians from the beginning who, careful not to confuse myth with history, find no place, since the first 'Flaring Forth', for an actual

historical Fall, a geographical Eden. Humanity, they say, is not defined by an original act of disobedience, condemned from the very start to a punitive exile.

NEVER LOST

Paradise was never lost, they hold. Incarnation is not about restoring it. Planned from the very beginning, it is about the healing, flourishing and perfecting of our human nature as it evolves, despite its ignorance, darkness, alienation and destructiveness, into its final destiny in the heart of God. The Fall account is a story about our daily disruption of the harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation due to what Pope Francis calls, in his encyclical *Laudato si'* 'our presuming to take the place of God and our refusal to acknowledge our creaturely limitations'.

Original Sin is not the name of a primordial catastrophe: it expresses, as Fr Kevin Kelly puts it, 'the dark underside of our graced humanity and our graced world'. In *Christianity in Evolution* Jack Mahoney SJ critiques the theology of atonement that links the Fall with incarnation. He believes that 'it would be more theologically appropriate now to drop (the doctrine of Original Sin) as unnecessary and cumbersome baggage.' Why? Because God's first intention was never thrown off course.

RADICAL REVISION

Some leading theologians call for a radical revision of this flawed teaching, this blight on the blossoming of Catholicism. Apart from its implicit denial of the evolutionary process, the doctrine is generally

understood to define our disobedient disposition, the flawed nature and origin of our human condition, the guilty way we stand before our Creator.

But we are born in God's image, not definitively shaped by sin from the beginning. Perhaps Baptism is not so much about exorcising a past Original Sin from the baby's soul as about preparing her innocent heart for encountering the waiting 'sin of the world' (St Paul).

NOT A FALLEN RACE

We are not a fallen race. We never were. And this, of course, is a lost traditional insight. St Augustine of Hippo wrote of the first creation as a *carmen Dei*, a divinely inspired symphony of incarnate beauty. St Bonaventure saw our planet and its people distilling light as a 'stained-glass window in the morning sun'. More recently Thomas Merton reminded us that we were created to be 'manifestations of divine beauty' in a world that is 'absolutely transparent, and the divine is shining through it all the time'.

Teilhard de Chardin was aware that the world stands at the threshold of a swiftly developing theology of creation together with a new cosmology. He believed that 'our former planetary and anthropocentric focus must give way to a fuller consciousness of cosmic community'.

RENEWAL OF THEOLOGY

And now, as astonishing discoveries and theories about our origin, evolution and destiny fill the media, a significant renewal in Catholic theology, spirituality and pastoral ministry must surely follow. Writing about 'the fecundity and creative artistry of the Creator', Zachary Hayes OFM, at the end of his *A Window to the Divine*, asks a fundamental question: 'How big a God do you believe in?'

Fr Daniel O'Leary

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www.djoleary.com

Leave room for God to surprise you



When we go on pilgrimage, we must decide where to go. Then we prepare for the journey. We read about it or Google. We make plans: what to take, where to stay, and cost it all.

There is a part of us that likes everything to be organised so that there are no hitches on the way. But we have to remember that pilgrimages are made in faith. Whatever our plans, we need to find a place for God in all the preparations and allow for those God-given moments, unplanned and unscheduled, where we can meet His love and grace. That is why we underpin the journey with prayer as well as preparation.

SPIRIT OF FAITH

If we think of the journeys in scripture – Abraham or Elijah, the wise men or the shepherds – what characterised them was not the preparation, but the spirit of faith in which they travelled. We need to journey with that same trust in the God who may surprise us.

David Sox realised that in the Holy Land. He had consulted maps and guides. But when he was there in person, the places made a special impression on him above and beyond what the books told him – even in the barren wilderness: 'At sunset the Bedouin scurry to light their fires and bring in their wandering goats; there is an eerie quiet in this region. Stopping in the de-

sert at night and experiencing the quiet is unforgettable.'

SENSE OF PEACE

Gerard Hughes wrote about a pilgrimage to Rome when he sat to enjoy a coffee at Grenoble. As he stretched out on a bench, he noticed that his boots were now without tread, his arms and legs were sun-tanned, and the soles and heels of his feet were hard. 'But,' he wrote, 'the important change was within me. I felt a great sense of peace, the peace of at-oneness...I felt I was seeing more, hearing more, and living more fully.'

He had changed physically, but he had also changed spiritually. His experience is a moving testimony to the way in which God can surprise each of us when we go on a special pilgrimage or make our journey through life. God can meet us, often when we least expect it, and transform our lives.

Canon Michael Burgess

PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE

O God of the journey,
lift me up,
press me against your
cheek.

Let your great love
hold me
and
create a great trust
in me.

Then set me down,
God of the journey;
take my hand in yours,
and guide me
ever so gently
across the new territory
of my life.

Joyce Rupp

When Terror rattles the bars

....*You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; for the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall (Isaiah 25:4 NKJV)*

Right up to the Jihadists of today, the tides of history show up the astonishing inability of power-mad violent men to learn from the past. 'Only with guns,' wrote Chairman Mao, 'can the whole world be transformed'. (Mao's Thoughts, page 61).

The Jihadists too have fallen to the lie - oblivious to posterity's verdict that resorting to violence to win your case is a candid admission that you have already lost the argument.



In Isaiah's time it was the Assyrians. Their supreme weapon was Terror, inspired by their distorted religious beliefs. By enslavement and exile, butchery, mutilations and beheadings, their aim was universal domination. Yet, despite the 'blast' threatened by their unremitting violence, the prophet predicted that this would eventually come to nothing as against 'the wall' that represented the stronghold of God's rule.

GREATER THAN THE GUN

And so it proved. Assyria's capital fortress-city of Nineveh was taken in August 612 BC, by a coalition of Babylonians and Medes. The vivid Bible book of Nahum prophesied its downfall in amazing detail, as was confirmed later by 19th century archaeologists. Nahum foresaw the coming disaster as the judgment of God, in the words 'I will leave

you no prey on the earth.' For centuries to come, all that was left of Nineveh was a mound - Tell Kunyunjik - 'The mound of many sheep.'

Its later name was Mosul - a modern city which today's Jihadists have battled to make their own. Their weapon is the gun. The greater weapon by far is prayer by God's people to Christ, the long-prophesied Man of destiny. The New King James Version gives us the true reading of Isaiah 32:2 in the words, 'A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'

'It is prayer,' wrote Jacques Ellul, 'and prayer alone, that can make history'.

Richard Bewes
from Parish Pump

The Songs of the Sinless

I came across this recently and thought it was worth including. It is written by Nigel Beeton, about whom I know nothing, and if it is copyrighted then I apologise. The poem really does fit to the hymn tune he mentions.

The deepening refugee crisis is now filling our newspapers and screens daily as the news of refugees struggling to reach the safety of Europe just seems to worsen and worsen. The sight of bodies, including those of children, being washed up on Mediterranean beaches, cannot fail to tug our heartstrings, drive us to our knees in prayer, and impel us to take ac-



tion.

The words for this poem came to me as I sang 'Alleluia, sing to Jesus', so some credit has to go to William Chatterton Dix!"

Hear the sad songs of the sinless
Call across the crystal sea,
Calling out for peace and safety
Calling out to you and me.
Can you hear their voices singing
Even from their ocean grave?
'We are lost but others follow

Others that you have to save!
'For we left our homes and country
Driven out by war and strife.
Driven out by men of evil
Men who cared not for our life.
So we left the land our fathers
Strove to make a better place;
As we fled our ancient homeland
Tears of sorrow stained our face.'

'All our worldly goods forsaken
Only hope - to that we clung.
Even that was taken from us
Now our final song is sung.
Shall our hopes for a bright future
Sink beneath the ocean blue?
Let our torch of hope and triumph
Pass instead from us to you!'

Nigel Beeton

And so we pray:

O God,
you bring hope
out of emptiness,
energy out of fear,
new life out of grief and loss.
As Mary returned to mourn
yet found unspeakable joy,
so comfort all
who have lost their homes
through persecution, war, exile
or deliberate destruction.
Give them security,
a place to live
and neighbours they trust
to be with them
a new sign of peace to the
world.

Janet Morley
(Christian Aid)

THE HOUSE THAT THOMAS BUILT

This story is from The Acts of Thomas, which circulated for a couple of hundred years until it was condemned in AD 496. Parts of the book were used by heretical Christians hence its being discarded. But the story still has something to say.

After the Resurrection, the apostles discussed who would take the Gospel into the world. Drawing lots, Thomas drew the lot for India. 'I'm not going there' he said, and nothing would move him. Then Jesus suddenly appeared. 'Thomas, go to India', he said, 'and tell them what I have said'. Again Thomas refused, saying 'I'll go anywhere else you choose but not there'.

There was an Indian merchant in Jerusalem, the king's agent, seeking a master builder for a new palace. The Lord saw him and said 'Are you looking for a carpenter?' 'Yes, my orders are to find a good man who will work in India.' The Lord said 'I have such a man and will sell him to you.' He picked out Thomas and sold him for three pounds weight in silver. The merchant asked Thomas 'Is this your master?' 'Yes, he is my lord.' Then he kept silent.

All day Thomas prayed and finally said 'I will go wherever you wish, Lord' and he went with the merchant. He took the three pounds of silver which Jesus had received for him, the Lord saying 'Let your worth go with you, together with my grace, wherever you may go'. The two then sailed away to India where the king asked, 'What trades do you know?' He said 'The carpenter's and the builders, and I've built monuments in wood and stone.'

'Can you build me a palace?' 'Yes', he said 'That is why I came'.

Thomas described his palace and the king was overjoyed at the prospect and left a great deal of money for the work. Then he went away. After a year he asked if it was finished. Thomas replied that the roof was still not completed. The year after that the king returned and said to Thomas, 'Let us go to see the building?' 'You cannot see it now' he answered 'but in your next life you will.'

The king was enraged. Those around him said 'There is no building to see. He has built nothing. He has given your money to the wastrels and beggars in the area. He's repaired their hovels, looked after their sick and old people and keeps telling them what Jesus taught him.' The king grew more furious and put Thomas in prison, together with the merchant. Then the king and his brother, Gad, decided to execute them both by burning them alive.

But Gad fell ill and died. The king mourned and planned a great funeral. The angels took Gad's spirit up to the dwellings of the blessed, asking, 'In which house do you wish to live?' They came to the house Thomas had built. 'That is where I would like to live', for the house was truly beautiful. The angel told him, 'You cannot live there. It is the house that Thomas built for your brother the king.' Then Gad begged to go back to earth again. The angels took him and he asked his brother 'Let me live in your house in the heavens.' But the king did not understand.

'How can I have a house in the heavens?' 'That Hebrew, Thomas, has built one for you'. On hearing this the king was amazed. He went to Thomas, released him and the merchant and said, 'Let me live in that house which you, labouring alone, have built for me with the grace of your God. And let me and my brother become his servants too and work for him.'

Then Thomas baptised them both, marked them with the seal of faith and before long the word of Jesus was known all over India



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GRAIL DIARY & EVENTS 2016

27 JANUARY – 2 FEBRUARY –

Secular Institute meeting in Rome

SATURDAY 5 MARCH South-
ern Partners meet in Winchester –
12 noon with shared lunch (*further
dates next time*)

16-19 MAY Grail Companions
meet in Winchester

SATURDAY 19 MAY Trustees
of the Grail Society meet in Win-
chester

SATURDAY 17 SEPTEMBER
Grail Day & AGM in Birmingham
– details later

West Midlands Grail Group usu-
ally meets on the first Sunday of
each month, in Birmingham, for
discussion and shared meal.

For further details contact Brian
Ferry on 01214755419



HAPPY CHRISTMAS
TO YOU ALL
AND EVERY BLESSING
FOR THE COMING YEAR



As Grail
we creatively quest
for the treasure of great price,
accepting and valuing
each person
wherever they may be
on their journey.

On this journey
we are aware of
God's presence around us
in creation,
in society,
in each other
and in all we meet.

We are committed to sharing
our Christian inspiration
and values
in and for the world today.

As a Eucharistic community
we try to educate, enliven,
and colour life
with good humour,
creativity and celebration.

THE GRAIL

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