

	<p style="text-align: center;">The Order of St James (UK) Newsletter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">April 2023</p> <p style="text-align: center;">www.orderofstjames.info</p>	
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THE CROSS - a meditation Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

A church nearby is re-staining and preparing three crosses to be installed on a hillside close to a major dual carriageway to be erected next week as a reminder to passing motorists of Lent and Holy Week, though many 'passing by' [All ye that pass by] may be only faintly aware of the significance for the rest of us of this vital symbol of Our Lord's death. They are of course vacant crosses not 'crucifixes' ['no little man on them' as the Jerusalem salesman put it] as our symbol of the Resurrection of Our Lord, Risen from the Dead having proved and propounded and established once and for all our Redemption.

A procession of pilgrimage and witness is planned by several churches in the nearby town, united across their specific denominations, on Good Friday, with worship songs at the top of the hill and at the foot of the crosses.

Hanging on walls of faithful families, carried in purses, dangling above dashboards in cars and ever present on the backs of donkeys at our local donkey sanctuary here in Devon, and on buns presented handily in supermarkets, the symbol is ever present for 'those who have eyes to see. The message will again be proclaimed in every church and fellowship throughout the land, for 'all who have ears to hear'. The faithful will cross themselves and genuflect as liturgy and convention require;

veneration of The Cross dating from the 4C and making the sign of the Cross before one's torso from the 3C [viz Tertullian]

American movies were anxious to visualize, as literally as possible, the historical record of hundreds of crosses down Roman highways as a warning to those who sought to undermine or disobey Roman law, and crucifixion, probably the cruellest of public executions, was often practiced on a much larger scale than these three sparse crosses, dramatically presented with our Lord on a larger one in the middle with two criminals on either side. It is how the narrated story runs.

Much of the visual image comes from medieval images - painting and sculpture - often vivid and lurid in its bloody detail and wretched suffering and agony - maybe in a more cruel society of days past it was considered by the priesthood of the day to make it as real and horrid as possible to inspire devotion and penitence, adoration and worship. I am not sure that is necessarily so when we witness so much in images and live footage of today's Ukraine war and a dozen other conflicts in our present world. Have we possibly become a bit more hardened to the Gospel story in these latter times, I wonder?

I have been fortunate, in my twenty one group leaderships to The Holy Land, to have witnessed the crowded and rather gory, noisy and demonstrative processions up the Via Dolorosa to the main Calvaria within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The almost more believable evangelical Garden Tomb further up in the city towards St George's Cathedra is then refreshingly calm and illustrative of an empty tomb, quiet and meditative after the rambunctious ritual of the inner city.

The idea of the cross on a hill or high point, or the top of a church or cathedral implies a renewal of the covenant between God and his people, reconciled through the Passion of God's son and giving hope and assurance of the presence of God in the lives and the hearts of his faithful people. That is why displaying a cross within the home states, or should do, that this house is 'a house of God' as much as any church should be. Shrines and personal oratories are increasingly popular now, as they were from mediaeval times to today and faith exploration, privately as well as publicly, seems on the increase, personal, committed and sincere.

At this Lenten period leading up to Holy Week and Easter, contemplate your cross, wherever you find it - wherever you place it - and renew your own personal commitment and covenant, seeking God's will and order for your life and those whom you love and for whom you pray - and may you be and feel blessed.

Nails for Easter

A meditation on the crucifixion. +Ian

The carpenter considered the task in hand

And chose three nails

Two pieces of rough hewn wood

And a good Traveller

Who spoke with loving honesty

With heavy stroke the nails were driven in

With sure purpose

They were not meant to be removed

But to forever stay

And fix mankind to God and God to mankind

It hurt

And innocent blood was spilled on innocent ground

By those with guilt

And the earth shuddered at such apparent savagery

In this act

Mankind was intent on pinning God down with nails

And wielding the hammer

Hammered them in

With uncompromising blows of jealous theological intent

Political necessity

And intellectual reasoning

And an unquenchable thirst for power and control

Then mankind held God up

To dark scorn and derision

For when God is dead there is no sin

The good traveller looked from his cross

Half way between earth and heaven

And knew the victors had lost

The defeated had won

The first had come last and the last had come first

Such irony

To give up one's life

Only to find it again in many

And see

The dead wood of the cross turn into the tree of life

Calvary become Eden

The road to hell become the path to Heaven

And the dark become light

Such irony

The carpenters work was true and good

The nails are still there

Holding mankind and God together

In a simple act

Binding me to you

You to me

And us to God

On Matthew 21:1-11

+David

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

We have all heard of Palm Sunday. Most of us have heard it preached about time and time again. Generally, we know the story. What we often miss is why the story is significant. Many churches do pageantry and wave palm leaves and, when there is a large Sunday School, we think it is cute to have the children's parade during the service, usually during the first hymn.

What we want to consider in this Address is what makes this day significant - and what makes Palm Sunday significant, and the Palm Sunday ride important is really what happens after the parade. So our theme is, After the Parade.

Of course, we want to refresh ourselves on the details of the Palm Sunday ride. It happened during the holy season. Palm Sunday occurred just before the Passover. The Jews didn't call it Palm Sunday back then, of course, that is the Christian designation for the day. It simply happened the beginning of the week which would, that year, conclude with the Passover. Like Easter, Passover was a moveable feast. It depended on which day the New moon occurred in a specific month.

Crowds were descending on Jerusalem for this holiest of all holidays in the Jewish church. Passover was the day of salvation. They celebrated God's rescue from the bondage of slavery in Egypt.

They commemorated by word and deed – which included the holy Passover Seder – the miraculous deeds of God. In the Passover, God sent the Angel of Death to strike down the first born of Egypt – and He caused the Angel of Death to pass over the Children of Israel who trusted in the promise of God and marked their doors with the blood of the lamb. In the Seder they shared the bread of haste that the children of Israel had known on the first Passover because of how swiftly they had to leave Egypt after God's mighty acts, and the bitter herbs which symbolised for them the bitterness of slavery in Egypt, and the meat of the lamb which the children of Israel ate for the first time in this fashion at the first Passover. They ate lamb because the lamb had been killed to provide the blood which marked their doors to protect them from the angel of death – and because God commanded them to do so.

For the Jews in those days, the Passover was like Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Easter all rolled up into one – except that, by the time of Jesus, they had lost the sense of wonder at it all, and had lost any awareness of the spiritual dimension of it, and they let it become a day of obligation rather than the day of utter joy that it was intended to be.

But observing it filled Jerusalem, and so the crowds who had come to the holy city to join in the ancient celebration were gathered.

And they were primed by the modern sense – modern for those days – of the nearness of the Messiah, and the longing for freedom from foreign domination, and a religious fervour which cried out not so much in hope as in desperation. They were looking for the Messiah, even though they did not often understand what the Messiah was really about. They pictured another political rescue by another purely political leader. They imagined Israel would rise as a political power and crush her enemies and then every lust of the flesh would be granted to Israel to demonstrate their favoured relationship with the Almighty.

And strange things were happening in their day. There seemed to be an awful lot of demonic signs and possessions. Then there were new preachers and prophets – first John, now Jesus – and there were other prophets and Messianic pretenders about whom history tells us, even if they are only hinted at in the Bible. The time was right, the crowds were gathered, the religious atmosphere was primed, and Jesus got up on that donkey and rode into Jerusalem like a king of ancient Israel on a coronation ride – and suddenly everything came together, just as God planned, to form the coronation ride of Jesus.

The leaders of the Temple complained. Jesus told them that it couldn't be helped. If the crowds were silenced, the very stones along the path would have to cry out. This was not a natural event, but God's work. He arranged the coronation ride of the King, the Messiah whom no one would recognise and no one would claim, but who was true King and Saviour none the less. The cry was the coronation cry of Israel, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Although the crowd cried it out in glee and in religious fervour, it seemed as though they did so without understanding the true meaning of the words, but the words really said a great deal. "Hosanna" – "Hoshia - ah - na" means "Grant salvation now!" or simply "save us now!"

And that is what Jesus had come to do, more fully than they could have anticipated, more completely than they had desired. They called Him “the son of David.”

They understood that the title was a royal title. They were calling Him the rightful King of Israel, a title for which He would be crucified in less than a week. But they probably overlooked the Messianic meaning of the words. They were probably not thinking about the Old Testament promises of the one who would be called “Immanuel”, who would take on their sins and die in their place. But those things are the things which happened after the parade.

They didn’t seem to think about the Suffering Servant, come to be Messiah, Saviour, and King, but that is who Jesus was – and is. And this parade was His coronation ride. It was not of any earthly, political value. It was not valid in the eyes of the governments of the time. But it was of eternal and heavenly significance. For a moment in time, God’s people heralded God’s Anointed Messiah and proclaimed Him King of Israel and Saviour of the World. They threw their cloaks in His path and formed a spontaneous parade to welcome Him into the holy city. After the parade, He would ascend His throne.

But it would not be a throne of gold and cushions and comfort and political or military power, it would be a throne of pain and suffering and sorrow and death. It would be the throne of the cross.

And His crown would be a crown of thorns pressed brutally into His scalp. His royal robes would be torn from Him and offered as the prize in a game of chance, and His sceptre would be a sprig of hyssop with a sponge soaked in soured wine mixed with a common pain-killer from which He would not even permit Himself to drink.

His royal court would be mockers and mourners and two convicted felons, and He would be firmly fastened hand and foot to His throne of agony with large nails.

Just a week later, those who heralded Jesus as King would reject God as their King and claim only Caesar.

This series of events actually began in Bethlehem, and would not be finished until the King ascended His throne and conquered all His enemies, as all the prophets and so many of the Psalms predicted.

And the last enemy to be utterly defeated, the Bible tells us, is death. His resurrection showed us His victory over sin and death and Satan. And the good news for us is that He wants to share His victory with us. He has conquered death. He has redeemed us from sin. He has paid the penalty and borne the wrath of God in our place. His resurrection is the evidence that it is complete and sufficient.

That is why it is so horrible when those who would call themselves Christian teachers try to suggest – or say boldly – that Jesus did not actually rise physically from the grave. Without the resurrection, there is no Gospel. That is why the unbelieving world always attacks this foundation truth. Without the resurrection, there is no forgiveness of sins. Without the resurrection there is no hope of heaven. Without Jesus rising from the grave, we have no reason to expect that we will either – and no demonstration of His power to make it happen for us.

But now Jesus has risen from the dead. It happened after the parade. Now it is our turn to pick up the palm branches and cry aloud the coronation praise of our King. He approaches His throne in our lessons once again. We will celebrate again the events of that holy week so long ago that worked our salvation. Your sins and mine, paid for and forgiven. The promises are for us as well – forgiveness and resurrection from our graves and life everlasting in glory with Jesus. He that believes and is baptised shall be saved! And to think, the best part of all of this happened after the parade!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, **✝**and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN

Accepting like a child.

+Ian

'Truly, I tell you; whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.' (Luke 18, v17)

I deal with children every day as a teacher in a primary school and sometimes I wonder just why anyone in their right mind would have anything to do with children. They can be very difficult, time consuming, demanding and emotionally draining, and that is on a good day!

Am I teasing you? Well, yes and no. There is a lot of truth in what I say, but it is not the complete truth as you have probably guessed.

Whatever the truth of it is, my experiences with children do make me wonder why Jesus used the words 'like a child'. What was it he saw in children that was so important?

It may be something to do with children's ability to learn new things quickly, to look at new ideas with open minds, the 'awe and wonder' factor when they discover something new about the big, wide world they are coming to know. Was it this Jesus saw that was so important?

I think that it may be possibly be more to do with the way children respond to their parents.

I remember my own children when they were young and their total and absolute trust. There were no doubts in their minds that their mum and dad could fix it, make it, explain it, make a game around it, sing a song about it, plant it and make it grow, make them laugh, feel better, stop it hurting, console and entertain, cuddle them and give hugs when needed, catch them, pick them up, dust them down. There was even that unexplainably nice feeling of 'just

being with' when you didn't need to say anything or be doing anything. These are just a few of the things I remember.

I think that it is this child/parent relationship that Jesus was talking about when he spoke of accepting the Kingdom of God 'like a child'. Re-read what I said about my own children but look at it in terms of yourself as the child and God as the parent. The passage becomes 'there is no doubt in your mind that God can fix it, make it, explain it..... plant it and make it grow in your life , make you laugh, make you feel better, stop you hurting, console and entertain you, comfort you, catch you when falling, pick you up if you fall and dust you down'. It is intended to imply a simple, certain and uncomplicated trust, a childlike trust.

If you are not sure of this idea, ask yourself why Jesus taught the use of 'our Father' when praying? In the original translation, the word used is 'Abba' which I am assured translates more like 'daddy'. There is a big contextual difference when using the words 'father' and 'daddy'. Think about it - what is the difference between 'wait until your father gets home,' and 'wait until your daddy gets home'? Why would Jesus suggest this form of addressing God if it wasn't to re-inforce the idea of being child-like before God? Notice I said 'child-like', not 'childish'.

How does this affect our prayers?

If you think about the confidence children have when asking for or telling something to their parents you have a model. They don't hold back. They just go for it. Their trust is complete. It is as simple as that. This is a wonderful prayer model. This is the way to take the Kingdom of God by storm. It is unbelievable.

We pick up a lot of baggage in our lives. We become sophisticated, cynical, hard realists. We need reasons, science, facts and figures. We are tainted with a 'no pain, no gain' philosophy (the Protestant work ethic in a new form?), everything has to be earned or paid for because there is 'no such thing as a free lunch'.

How wrong can we be!

God's unconditional love for us is almost too hard for us to accept. It is there to be accepted. We just need to learn to how to break free of the things within us that hold us back. There are no hidden charges. It is absolutely free and completely without strings. All we have to is accept it as it is and not make it any more complicated than it actually is. This what I mean when I use the phrase 'let go and let God'. In doing so we are given back our real freedom.

Pray about it. If what I have been saying strikes a real chord within you and you really want to learn how to take this freeing up of not only your prayer life but of your whole life then pray about it. Ask God to show you how to let go of the things that hold you back, and believe. It will happen. It probably won't happen immediately and completely. Most of us have to learn to let go in stages. Be sure of this though, if you have prayed for this, it will happen. Just believe and hold onto that belief. Don't let anybody take the trust you have put in God away from you. Just go for it. No conditions, just go for it.

You will not be disappointed.

Making things grow in the garden.

+Ian

It is one of the things I like a lot, going into an empty church to pray.

I like the quiet and the peace. I like the way sunlight catches the dust in the air. I like being amongst the quiet 'ghosts' of all those who have prayed before me. One day I hope someone will take my place and sit where I am sitting right now and think of people like me. I like to think of all the prayers that might have been said in this quiet place.

That is the romantic in me.

The truth is I don't just pray in church. At the end of the day a church is just a building and it isn't really a church until it fills with the family of God. I pray in all sorts of places, my car, at work, at home, anywhere, even on the loo (I'm sure God doesn't mind). I just pray as I feel the need, as thoughts and prompts come into my head.

Not everyone can do this though. Some people find prayer very difficult outside of a church.

I was talking about this with my son Graham. He hasn't decided about all this 'God stuff' yet but he came up with this brilliant idea to help people pray. He is at agricultural college and is learning all about plants and gardens.

'Why not make your own garden into a garden of prayer,' he said. What a cool idea.

Think about making a path around your garden that goes past many different areas and plants of different kinds. Let these act as reminders for you where you can stop and pray about the people they remind you of. Simple.

In my own garden, for example, I would go out of the dining room into the conservatory. This is a real hot house, just like school, so I would pray about the staff and children.

From there I walk straight out onto the lawn and there is a special spot where my wife and I sit, often with friends. It is a shady place in the heat. I could sit here a while I pray for Lesley (my wife) and my friends, giving thanks for the special fellowship we share.

This place is by the small pond we have inherited from the previous owners of the house. This could represent the watering place, the fellowship of all the Christians we know. Again I could stop a few moments here and remember these people and their needs.

And so on throughout the garden. You see how it could work. It is a bit like the 'stations of the cross' in church but this is something designed by you to help you in your prayers.

It can even work informally, without a regular path, just wandering where you will, being reminded of different people as you come to different places. It would certainly make gardening different and probably less of a chore.

I can't help but be reminded of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, walking with God before the fall. It also reminds me of the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus agonising about his imminent future. What wonderful and sometimes awesome places gardens can be.

This is just one of the many ways we can use a small part of our environment to help us in our prayer journey.

Being still.

+Ian

We all need periods of 'stillness' in our busy lives, although perhaps 'parking off life's highway' is a more precise phrase to use. It refers to the time we take to stop and catch our physical, emotional or/and spiritual breath back. It is an important time and we can't do without it.

However, it is not the same as 'being still' and this is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of prayer to come to terms with. We are surrounded by the noise of communication (perhaps it should be called 'communibabble') and it is difficult to ignore its pull.

Even when it is physically quiet our minds don't stop. Our head is full of things we need to do, things we want to avoid doing, things that we need to say, things that we don't need to say but will anyway, things that we need to think about and sometimes things we shouldn't be thinking about, people we need to see and people we want to avoid, and so on.

Even when we are supposed to be listening our minds are actively on other things.

Then God says 'Be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46, verse 10).

If you look at this text you will see that it has two parts and they have a particular order.

(a) 'Be still'

(b) 'and know that I am God.'

According to the text, there has to be a point of stillness before God can be known and I will add that I think that this is probably not supposed to be a 'one

off' event. I think it is more likely meant to be 'ongoing'.

So what is 'being still'?

Do you remember going into the woods and hearing, not just being aware of, the birds singing for the first time? Do you remember being able to distinguish all the different bird songs and noticing their variety? Do you remember being surrounded by all of these wonderful sounds? Do you remember trying to see which bird it was singing which song? Were you then aware of other noises, the insects, the wind rustling the leaves and blowing through the ground foliage, even hearing the sound of your own clothes as you moved and the sound of your own breathing? Do you remember the sense of amazement and realisation'?

You were 'being still'.

In being still you became aware of so many ordinary, everyday things and saw that they were not ordinary and everyday. You were filled in some measure with 'awe and wonder', and it was pretty amazing, wasn't it!

Translate this experience into prayer. When we allow the ordinary and everyday to reveal itself to us to us in this way we become aware of God. 'Being still' leads to each one of us becoming much more aware of the power, creativity and love of God.

In our prayer time we could give God a little more room by being quiet for five or ten minutes, standing still and just 'looking around us', looking for where God has been, seeing where He is right now. We do not need to speak other than to ask that we may see more clearly and be less deaf to His words.

If our minds are filled with distractions then pray each one of them out of your

mind. Give each thought to God as an offering of your love. Once prayed about then ask for them to be quietened. If the thought won't be quietened then pray about it again, it may be God prompting us to pray about something urgent or someone who has an urgent need.

When at a state of quietness then wait upon God. Give God time and don't rush or let your feelings cheat you out of this moment. Be still, be quiet. Just enjoy being in the presence of God. If nothing else you will be gently and quietly refreshed spiritually. God will speak to you in His own way.

I am not saying it will be easy. We have a life time of bad habits to overcome I suspect. For myself, I still find it very hard to 'be still' but it more than worth the effort. Be patient and your patience will be rewarded many times over.

Be a trouble-maker, start a prayer ministry.

+Ian

The last thing I actually want you to be is a 'trouble-maker'. I used the title to get your attention and it obviously worked, so I hope you will forgive me.

The truth of it is that in starting a prayer ministry, people may see you as a trouble maker, a radical, a left-winger, an upsetter of apple carts, or one of a whole host of generally disreputable people. If you fit into any of these categories already then you probably have a head start and are involved in stirring up your church at this moment. I wish you well and I will pray for your success. However, I am going to offer you some advice that was given by Wayne Tow of St Mark Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas at a prayer seminar on 10th February, 1996. It may help you avoid some of the trouble you are going to get your self into or perhaps are already in.

Setting up a prayer ministry is another way of saying that you are getting serious about prayer and you want others to be involved. First step - pray about it. Prayer is the foundation of beginning anything. Be clear that you have a distinct calling from God. Once you have that, hang onto it because there will be times that you will wish you had never started and are riddled with doubt. It will seem that everyone and everything is against you at times. If this happens then you will know that you are developing a successful prayer ministry.

Find others who think as you do and pray together and pray regularly.

Gradually, through prayer and some probably very heated arguments the way forward will prayerfully emerge and so will a prayerfully agreed group leader. If it is not you then you may have to bite the bullet as they say. Do not take your bat and ball home in disgust otherwise your real motives will become apparent to other people. Remember that this is just the person or people who will lead the group meetings, they have not been elected as prayer ministry leaders. We all have to learn that we are serving God, not our egos, for this to be a success.

A church group will not survive long without the support of the pastor, clergy or elders. (This doesn't mean that they need to actually be involved in prayer ministry, you just need their agreement and public support). A prayer ministry group will not last long no matter how biblically or theologically sound its base is. You need this official support. Pray until you have it. If the need for a prayer ministry is not seen or acknowledged then you have a real problem with the basic theological basis on which the church is built. The way forward - you've guessed - pray, pray, pray, otherwise known as the three 'P's.

Not everyone who has an official role or capacity in your church has opinions that count amongst the church family. This is not meant unkindly. Some are chosen because they can be relied upon to do a job properly, not because of

what they think. It is a fact of life though that the opinions of often unelected members of the church family can carry a lot of clout within the church family and it is worth getting the support of these people. Pray diligently about who to approach and how it should be done. Help create a ground swell of support that cannot be ignored.

When you have got this far you need to seriously look for a prayer ministry leader if one has not already emerged. It has to be someone who is recognisably called by God and has the special talents and skills needed. This is a very important moment. The person who was prayerfully elected to lead the ministry group may not be suitable as a prayer ministry leader. Everyone in the church family needs to pray about this carefully. This is a key decision. Pray and ask God to reveal who He has chosen and then to confirm His choice if there is any doubt. It could even be that God elects someone from outside of your church family. There is a thought to ponder over.

Whatever the outcome of that, there will probably be lots of problems at this point. When prayer becomes a serious issue then there will be spiritual opposition. It is through effective prayer that the church will grow forward. If the pray-ers (the people who pray) can be divided and beaten at this point then prayer can be stopped. The recommended action is - you've guessed- prayer and lots of it. Keep focused on God and the way ahead will be clear.

By now a prayer ministry group will probably have evolved and it will have someone to lead it who has the necessary and special gifts. The group will be meeting regularly and enjoying some success. What happens now?

Prayer skills need developing by all the group. There is a lot of spiritual feeding to be done.

This is where teaching about prayer is important, but what to teach, when and by whom is important. Too many new things in too short a time will put lots of pressure on the group and it may collapse. Too little development and it may die of boredom. Be certain through prayer.

Delegation of roles, the building of strong and effective leaders and support structures now becomes an issue. Burn out is a real problem, especially when the person concerned feels they have become trapped in their leadership roles and ministries.

Leaders need to be clear about what their responsibilities are and have a strong sense of ownership, about not taking on anything else or being put upon, and about learning how to kindly but firmly say 'no' without being made to feel guilty. Pray about each issue as it comes up. Good leaders are hard to come by and are not easy to find replacements for. Have in mind some ideas for that time when leaders move on.

The group needs to be flexible if they are going to survive. Not everything is right for everyone. Leaders don't need to be at every meeting, all of the time, neither do group members. Each member has to sort out what is right for them in God. If the system becomes rigid in any way it will break down. Also, people need to be able to come into the group and go freely. How will your group enable people to do this?

Will it appear to be an exclusive or very selective group? If it does appear exclusive then you are possibly already on the road to collapse.

You might also consider how it treats its members, some will have lots of prayer experience and others very little; how do you make all feel welcome and comfortable in the group? More matter for prayer.

Lastly, keep the main body of the church family informed as to what you are doing in prayer ministry. If they don't know what is going on they won't support it or show interest. Information needs to flow two ways so you can keep on top of prayer needs. Pray that the communications procedures work freely and effectively for all.

Be careful that you don't create or allow the creation of an 'us and them' situation with two classes of Christian in the church family, the 'those that pray and those that don't' scenario. This one is really contentious so be very watchful. Once the damage is done it can be very hard to resolve.

Why do it when it is going to be so hard? Simply because it is worth all the aggravation, heartache, effort, hard work, commitment, dedication and tears. The fruits far outweigh the effort. You will grow, the prayer ministry team and members of the team will grow and the church will grow. All for the want of a 'trouble-maker'. I take it you like the idea..... so pray about it.

-oOo-

News Items To Make us Think.....

'Gender identity doesn't exist': words from Jacob Rees-Mogg

'I can now exclusively reveal that I in fact identify as not having a gender identity, because I don't believe such a thing exists.

Genesis 1:27, So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

It is not for us to overrule the work of God.

The only reason I say this is because a new Policy Exchange report has just revealed that schools across the UK now relentlessly pursue the policy of gender affirmation. Asleep at the Wheel - a rather fitting title.

What's more, they're not even telling the children's parents.

Only 28 per cent of secondary schools are reliably informing parents as soon as a child discloses feelings of gender distress.

33 percent of secondary schools did not say they would inform their Designated Safeguarding Lead or a medical practitioner when a child discloses gender distress.

Four in ten secondary schools operate policies of gender self-identification.

Many more shocking statistics.

- This is in spite of the fact that the Children's Act 1989 states parental involvement in the life of their child is paramount; no other body is to assume parental responsibility for a child unless the court intervenes.

- It is overwhelmingly in society's interest that parents are responsible for their children's education.

- Everyone believes in toleration. Discrimination against trans people is wrong. This doesn't mean children should be encouraged or forced into it.

Traditions are the solution, they always safeguarded our children. We are going to bring our traditions back.

NHS Trust said diversity 'takes precedence' over religious belief.

Edited original source material - Gabriella Swerling

A Catholic chaplain who lost his job has been awarded £10,000 after the NHS Trust he worked for claimed that **equality and diversity "take precedence over religious belief"**.

Rev. Dr Patrick Pullicino was pursuing a claim against the NHS Trust for harassment, religious discrimination and victimisation.

Rev. Dr Patrick Pullicino, 73, launched legal action against an NHS trust after claiming that he was ousted for answering a hospital patient's questions about the Church's teaching on marriage.

Rev Pullicino was pursuing a claim against the Trust for harassment, religious discrimination and victimisation. A trial was set to take place in July at Croydon Employment Tribunal. However, the London NHS Trust, which denies that it has discriminated against him, settled the case by awarding him £10,000 in compensation "for perceived injury to feelings". The figure falls within the middle band of guidelines for "serious" cases of discrimination.

Following the settlement, he said it was “crucial” to expose the NHS’s “disturbing approach to the standard expression of Christian beliefs”.

“There is a tendency throughout the NHS to force their patients to accept generic ‘spiritual’ care instead of giving support for their Christian beliefs,” he added “Christian faith is particularly important in sickness, particularly when in danger of death.

“Limiting this is inhumane, in addition to being outside the law. Good, religion-specific chaplaincy support is under threat in the NHS but is essential in all hospitals.

“A government inquiry is urgently needed to restore Hospital Chaplaincy to its rightful place.”

The incident at the NHS hospital regarding his faith occurred in August 2019 when he was assigned to visit a male patient on one of the hospital’s mental health wards who had specifically requested to see a Catholic chaplain.

Rev Pullicino, who is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre, claimed that he lost his job with South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust after a patient, who was in a same-sex relationship, asked for his opinion on marrying his partner. Rev Pullicino responded: “What do you think God would say to you about this?”

‘You would go to hell’

After the patient made a complaint about his comments, Rev Pullicino, who was a temporary member of staff at the Trust, had his contract terminated while he was on annual leave in January 2020 “due to the budgetary constraint”.

In a letter written in response to the patient’s subsequent complaint, Vanessa Ford, the acting chief executive of South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust, stated that its policy on equality and diversity “takes precedence over religious belief”.

A spokesperson from South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust said: “We are pleased that we have agreed an outcome with Mr Pullicino which avoids the need for further proceedings.

“We remain absolutely committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) for our patients, staff and communities. We respect and celebrate all protected characteristics equally, including religion, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

“We take seriously our responsibility to ensure patients’ spiritual needs are met and we oppose any form of discrimination. We seek to protect all patients and members of staff in line with the Equality Act 2010.”

Rev Pullicino was ordained as a Catholic priest in 2019 and is a former consultant neurologist.

Response from MP Alec Shelbrooke

+Ian

I recently wrote to my local MP to make objections to recent ten minute rule motion in chambers which would have signalled intentional state interference in the running of the Church of England and left it a matter of individual conscience for priests to perform same sex marriages against the joint will of the Bishops.

Whilst he personally favours same sex marriages being allowed in the Church of England, he is not in favour of state interference in the running of the Church of England.

Whilst I am no lover of the Church of England, state interference in the running of the church has implications for all of us and we must be on our guard.

-oOo-

LIVE TO SERVE AND SAVE

+David

Remember no prayer goes unanswered. Remember that the moment a thing seems wrong to you, or a person's actions to be not what you think they should be, at that moment begins your obligation and responsibility to pray for those wrongs to be righted, or that person to be different.

Face your responsibilities. What is wrong in your country, its statesmen, its laws, its people? Think out quietly, and make these matters your prayer matters. You will see lives you never touch altered, laws made at your request, evils banished.

Yes! Live in a large sense. Live to serve and to save. You may never go beyond one room, and yet you may become one of the most powerful forces for good in your country, in the world.

You may never see the mighty work you do, but I see it, evil sees it. Oh! It is a glorious life, the life of one who saves. Fellow workers together with me. See this more and more. Live with Me, sharers of My life. Amen.

IS OUR FAITH STRONG?

+David

If I were to ask you this question? "Is our faith as strong as that of our forefathers a century ago?" I wonder what your answer would be!

Were you aware that David Livingstone, the famous explorer and missionary, was once stuck on the bank of a river for days, his native followers dreading to cross in such hostile territory.

Eventually he decided that the crossing would have to be made at night. In preparation for this, he opened his Bible, and the verse he read was, "Lo, I am with you alway."

He put down the book, and told his followers that they were going to cross the river at once. "What about the enemy?" they cried. "We will all be killed!" "Jesus will be with us," he said. "He has promised to be with us always, and He never breaks his word."

The crossing was made without a casualty. How good it is to be able to trust a higher power so completely with one's life!

A HISTORY OF ST CUTHBERT

+David

The name of Cuthbert was a recent conversation between Anne and myself when she brought to my attention a Cuthbert named cake in ALDI's. Anne was intending to purchase this cake for our granddaughter Gracie's first birthday. For me the cake was of chocolate sponge and appeared to be a Caterpillar. This was something new I learned that day!

To me what immediately came to mind was St Cuthbert.

It is interesting to note that over Thirteen hundred years ago a boy named Cuthbert was a shepherd lad in the North of England. Like all boys he loved sports, and because he was very strong he could usually beat his friends at most games. In running, jumping, wrestling, it was said that no one his own age could beat him.

Sometimes Cuthbert would have to stay out all night with his sheep, and he would have to keep awake in case a wolf came prowling near them. Sitting on a rock he would try to count the stars. And then he would thank God for all the beauty of the world, and best of all for the love and the care God showed to him. He would ask God, in his prayer, if the time could come quickly when he might serve Him.

One night, as Cuthbert sat by a little fire and looked out into the dark, he saw a great stream of light break through the darkness. And in and around that stream he thought he saw angels with their shining wings. As he watched, the shaft of light moved until it stood over a house nearby, where there lived some wonderfully kind and gentle monks. And it seemed to Cuthbert that the angels and the stream of light had a message for him.

In the morning, when Cuthbert was free, he went to the great house, and he said to the monks there, "I want to serve God as you do. Can I come in, and will you reach me?"

At length Cuthbert became a teacher and a preacher himself. Everywhere he went people listened eagerly to his message. They watched for his coming, they loved him so much. If anyone was ill or in trouble they knew that Cuthbert would help them. They believed, so wise did he seem, he even knew their thoughts.

One of the many lovely stories told about him is that one day he came to a little cottage, where a small child lay very ill. No one had been able to make her better. But Cuthbert, lifting her up in his strong arms, soothed her and comforted her.

And at last she settled down to sleep peacefully. Then, as he put her gently back on the pillow, he gave her a kiss. The mother told her friends, later, that it was the kiss of the Holy Cuthbert that made the little girl well.

One day Cuthbert watched some Monks bringing loads of wood down a river on huge rafts. Just as they reached the landing stage near their monastery a great storm arose, and swept the rafts out into the deeps. Other monks set out in small boats in order to bring the rafts back again, but the winds and tide were so strong that soon they were all in very great danger.

Some peasants were standing watching the monks. But they did nothing to help them, for they were heathen. "Let the monks drown." They cried, "it will serve them right for bringing their religion here, and preaching at us, and trying to stop us following our old god,"

Cuthbert was standing near these peasants, and he said to them, "Why do you jeer at men who are in danger of being drowned? You ought to help them. And if we can do nothing else, we can at least pray for them."

"We will not pray to your God," they shouted back, "and we hope the monks drown."

So Cuthbert knelt down alone to pray. And as he prayed the wind died down, and the waves sank to calmness, and the monks brought their wood safely to the shore. The peasants were awe stricken, and Cuthbert was able to preach to them of the God whose word could still the waves.

Cuthbert was one of the Saints who lived, not by the gifts of others, but by the work of his own hands. There was one year, however, when the grain he sowed did not come up. He had sown wheat, so he said to his friends, "I will try once more, and this time I will sow barley. If that does not come to a fine crop then I shall think I am not to be a preacher."

Cuthbert sowed his barley, and soon there appeared a wonderful crop. But no sooner did it begin to ripen that the ravens came to his field and started to eat it. The saint came hurrying to the scene and, as he afterwards liked to tell his smiling happy way, spoke to them, "Why are you touching a crop you did not sow? If you have God's permission, then eat. If not, be off."

And as he spoke the birds flew away, and never again came to rob him of his harvest.