



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

April 2020

My dear friends and colleagues,

The most stupendous event in the history of the *cosmos* – the most terrible wonder in the elapse of time between the initial and final big bangs – is never actually described. The Lord's Resurrection is, as it were, wrapped in veils. Jesus' burial may be described; lightning and earthquakes may be mentioned; women and men meet the mysterious stranger in the garden or on the road to Emmaus; but no television camera, no history-recording journalist, no purported eyewitness, intrudes into the darkness

and mystery of that cave-tomb. No Gospel writer claims to discern a tremor beneath the winding-cloth, no chronicler pretends to be able to describe the awe-ful countenance of the One who was dead and, in a moment, is alive. It is as if to do so would spoil the unimaginable wonder and terror of such an "event". For the Gospel writers it is as if even trying to imagine it is an unspeakable vulgarity. And the Church's liturgy is marked by the same hushed reticence: in the Song of the Candle, known as the Exsultet or Paschal Praeconium, which we hear at the Easter Vigil, the deacon exclaims in fearful wonder: "O Night truly blessed, *who alone wast worthy to know the time and the hour.*"



From the Archdeacon's desk

The greater the miracle and the greater the wonder, then the more need for a veil to shield our eyes. St Thomas Aquinas described what Christ did at the Last Supper as "the mightiest miracle that he ever worked during his life on earth". That same miracle is repeated every time that Mass is offered. At every Eucharist the stone is rolled away from the darkness of the tomb. When the words of consecration "This is my Body" are uttered, the Easter Lord who was dead and is alive emerges from eternity and comes among us; and the veil which prevents us from being overwhelmed by such a wonder is the form of bread and wine. The naked brightness of the divine reality would be too much for us as we are now. But as we kneel at the altar, every Eucharist is Easter and the Lord is the risen and invincible one and he whispers to each of us, as he whispered to Mary in the garden, the Name he has given us. And for a moment the veils become very thin, and he walks through every locked door into the upper room of each one of us.

A blessed Easter to you all, and may you all return safely from isolation to glorify God and give thanks for deliverance, being ever mindful of the sorrows of those who have endured suffering and loss.

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The Pelican

Our Bishop has an Episcopal Ring containing an amethyst carved with a pelican in her piety. The symbol of the pelican is often seen on vestments and in religious art. Bishop Damien has a chasuble depicting this image, and I possess a humeral veil that bears it too.

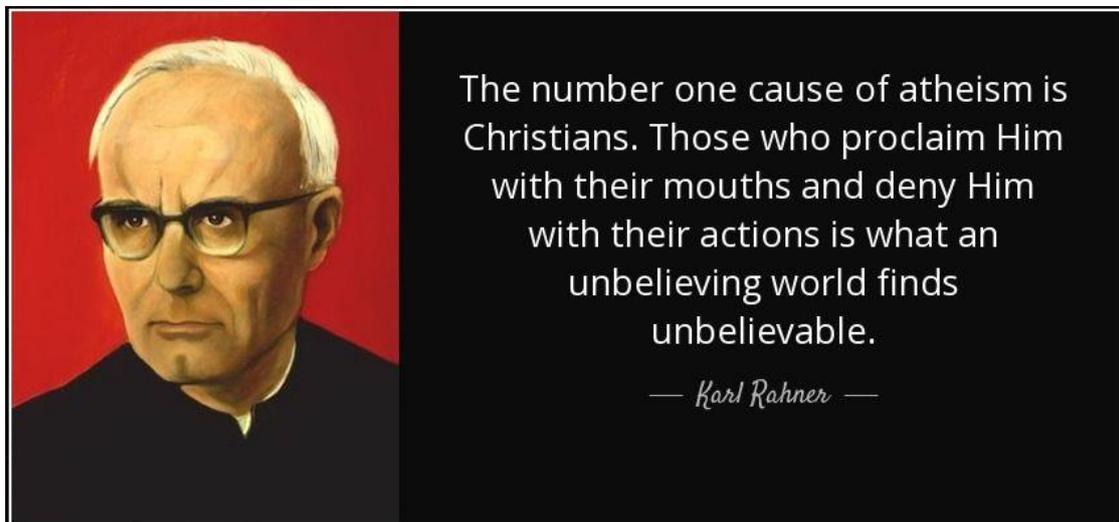


In medieval Europe, the pelican was thought to be particularly attentive to her young, to the point of providing her own blood when no other food was available. As a result, the pelican became a symbol of the Passion of Jesus and of the Eucharist. It also became a symbol for self-sacrifice, and was used in heraldry (“a pelican in her piety” or “a pelican vulning (wounding) herself”). Another version of this is that the pelican used to kill its young and then resurrect them with its blood, this being analogous to the sacrifice of Jesus. Thus the symbol of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) is a pelican (admittedly very stylised now), and for most of its existence the headquarters of the service was located at Pelican House in Dublin.

The emblems of both Corpus Christi College, Cambridge and Corpus Christi College, Oxford are pelicans, showing its use as a medieval Christian symbol (“Corpus Christi” means, of course, “Body of Christ”).

Likewise a folktale from India says that a pelican killed her young by rough treatment but was then so contrite that she resurrected them with her own blood.

These legends may have arisen because the pelican used to suffer from a disease that left a red mark on its chest. Alternatively it may be that pelicans look as if they are stabbing themselves as they often press their bill into their chest to fully empty their pouch, and they sometimes rest their bill against their chest. What rich symbolism is given to us by God’s natural world.



(For interest I will often use as a “desk picture” some Isle of Sheppey scenes viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it!)