



Anglican Catholic Church



## Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

December 2018

*My dear friends and colleagues,*

We know that at Christmas we are celebrating the human birthday of God. This birthday isn't like our own. On our birthdays we celebrate – or lament – all the years that have passed since we were born. But at Christmas we do not celebrate that Jesus is 2000 plus years old, or however many years have passed. We rejoice in the *birth* of God as a baby. Every Christmas is a celebration that God came among us as a newborn child. This is because God is always among us as one Who is young. St Augustine of Hippo wrote that *God is younger than all else*. Therefore in a strange sense we have become older than our God, which means that God always retains that fresh vigour of youth, the vitality and joyfulness of one who is always ready to begin afresh. We believe that God is eternal, and so He is often represented as immensely old. But if no time passes for God, then He is also always newly beginning – eternally young. Youthfulness and hope go together, because to hope is to be ready for a future which is always open and long, however old one may be. So will you celebrate Christmas by letting God *renew your youth like the eagle* (Ps. 103:5)? And it is the evangelist whose symbol is the eagle, St John, whose day we keep just two days after the Nativity, who writes that to all who accept the Word of God, *gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*.



**From the Archdeacon's desk**

Being a child of God means more than having God as one's Father. It means sharing in the eternal youthfulness of the child whose birth we celebrate. That doesn't mean pretending to look young, hiding the wrinkles, dying one's hair, or recoiling from the signs of age. We do age and mustn't fear it. It does mean that we can shed the temptations of those who grow older of thinking that we've seen it all and nothing new can be experienced. At Christmas we can let God renew hope in our hearts.

Wishing you a Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year

*Fr. Raymond Thompson*

Archdeacon

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Saviour. - Anon.

**This?**

**Or this?**



One of the great religious crises of modern times is the loss of our sense of the sacred. So said Pope Benedict XVI. Do we really want a Faith that is worldly, trite and uninspiring? Is it about time we rescued it from the fanatical destruction by the modernists before it is too late? There is one thing that the trendies can't stand, it seems, and that is any sign of a mystical element in our Faith or worship. Even in our secular society there are signs that people really are drawn to something that leads us beyond what we can see and touch to something which can inspire a sense of awe and wonder. The Second Vatican Council was misappropriated by some, who set out to "de-mystify" the church, all under the guise of supposed "noble simplicity", whatever that means. They got rid of beautiful vestments, glorious music, altar rails. They "re-ordered" churches and sanctuaries, and threw out statues and all that directed us away from our self-obsession and towards heaven. Out went the baby with the bath water as a result.

They replaced all that with an obsessive determination to pursue mundanity, ugly multi-functional "worship spaces", silly and repetitive choruses, guitars, drums, folk groups, and puppets. Altars were pulled forward and the priest looked across at the people like a shopkeeper behind his counter. No more facing towards God together – just each other. Any sense of something special, something ascending heavenward, disappeared, and the result is obvious in so many Anglican and Roman Catholic parishes today. It is no wonder numbers are dropping in general when these churches seem to be putting on a performance, centred on keeping the "audience" happy rather than worshipping God. They are pandering to the lowest common denominator, which demands next to nothing. In so many places there is, at best, casual disinterest, or, at worst, apparent non-belief as people queue up to receive the body and blood of Christ as you would queue for a coffee in a canteen. They do not kneel in adoration but stand and have the Sacred Species plonked into their hand, the bored priest mechanically grunting "the body of Christ", whereupon they pick it up and put it into their mouth whilst walking away nattering to their neighbour. I've witnessed it myself, as we all must have done. Showing no respect for the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament they treat the Church as though it were just a social club, revolving around the democratic views and agenda of the club members, where the priest is no more than the club steward.

However, we in the Anglican Catholic Church value and enjoy a unity which flows from an ancient mystical faith – a faith which won't compromise, because it comes from what God himself has revealed to us – and a faithfulness to the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and the tradition of the Church throughout the centuries. All of that inspires and demands genuine worship. Those other Churches once took that seriously, but now, so often, it seems as though they can't be bothered. That is tragic indeed.

*(At the risk of self-indulgence I will sometimes use as a "profile pic" some Isle of Sheppey scenes viewed "from my desk", from the garden, or within a few minutes of it!)*

