



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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My dear friends and colleagues,

I hope every one of you has been enjoying a very blessed and enriching Eastertide, and may Whitsun, Trinity and Corpus Christi also bring great joy. One of the rather brief but often underestimated seasons is that of Ascensiontide (which is forty days after Easter, and was not transferred to the nearest Sunday by the Apostles or the Holy Ghost, unlike some in today's Church who think they have a better plan!). After the apostles returned to their homes following Our Lord's departure into heaven they must have felt a strange mixture of emotions. They may have felt abandoned but at the same time elated that they had received such promises and been given such a commission and so great a responsibility. I think we would gain much by reflecting upon the prayerful and expectant atmosphere which must have prevailed during those ten days which elapsed between the Ascension and Pentecost while the disciples waited for the promised "Comforter". By doing so we might be privileged to experience with a fresh understanding the empowerment caused by the descent of the Holy Ghost and experience the excitement of those who witnessed the birthday of the Church. Such was the confusion and uncontained joy of the disciples on that day that they were accused of being intoxicated. In reply Peter used the Greek word "amethystos", which translates as meaning "we are not drunk". This is the origin of the use of an amethyst in the episcopal ring worn by bishops, who are the successors to the Apostles. (More about episcopal rings on the reverse.)



As most of you will know, our long-planned relocation has finally happened after many months of frustration with the whole moving process. Having been let down by buyers three times, and then having our vendors withdrawing after signing contracts, it seemed that it was never going to happen. Unexpectedly everything fell into place with a different property and things progressed quite quickly. (The picture shows the new location of the Archdeacon's desk!) We are a few minutes from the sea (which I can see as I type this) and have peacocks as regular visitors in the garden! The Isle of Sheppey is one of the few true islands of England, separated from the rest of Kent by the River Swale, and the name comes from the ancient Saxon *Sceapige*, meaning isle of sheep. There are hundreds of sheep to this day upon the large expanse of marshland which forms the southern part of the island. The islands of Sheppey, Elmley and Harty, through the silting up of the channels which once separated them, are now one continuous island with a number of beaches of different types – pebbles, shingle, sand and the very unusual Shellness, made of billions of shells. Sheppey is also the home of the most northerly colony of scorpions, which are believed to have migrated here from warmer climes on board a ship in the mid-19th century. They conserve their energy to cope with the relative cold by only moving about when absolutely necessary. They are seldom seen, thankfully! The island has much history, ancient and more modern, the erosion of the land at Warden Bay often exposing fossils. The abbey at Minster was founded by Saint Sexburga, a former queen of Kent, in 664. The church of Saint Thomas at Harty, built in 1089, is very remote and has no electricity, being lit by oil lamps. If you are unable to explore the island in person, an on-line visit could prove most interesting.

With every blessing

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Why should we kiss a bishop's ring?



It is quite remarkable how something which has been accepted and valued for centuries can suddenly become a matter of much contention and denial. My last article about the kissing of a bishop's ring certainly provoked both, and in quite an astonishing way. So, for the benefit of anyone who says they have never heard of such a practice, perhaps a word of clarification may be beneficial. Let me say first that this simple act is in no way performed to exalt the wearer or to commit idolatry as if the ring itself were being worshipped. It is an act of respect for the Episcopal office – the fact that the wearer is a successor to the Apostles and holds the fullness of the threefold ministry – which is symbolised by the Ring (and constantly reminded of by the wearing of the Ring) which was blessed and hallowed and placed upon a bishop's finger at his Consecration. The act does not infer earthly status, and indeed Roman Catholic monarchs do kiss Episcopal rings (see the picture of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia of Spain for example). The other photo shows Archbishop Rowan Williams greeting Pope John Paul in a similar way. Again, this is not to glorify the personage wearing it but reminds him that he is in unbroken line from the Apostles and it is therefore an action which humbles the wearer.

Once upon a time there was often set into or under the episcopal ring the relics of a Saint. Kissing the Ring after swearing an oath was a way of formally “sealing” the oath (such as the canonical oaths made at ordination). There are many examples of reverence being shown to an object because of what it represents. For example, the priest will kiss the cross at the neck of his stole when putting it on. Likewise the maniple. He will kiss the altar, and the altar missal at the opening word of the Gospel after reading it at Mass. We kiss the Palm Cross which we receive on Palm Sunday, and the foot of the cross on Good Friday. In doing so no-one is worshipping the fabric of the vestments, the wood of the table or crucifix, or the paper of the book, or the Palm itself. If so, we would be guilty of idolatry. But no, we are reverencing what they symbolise. Any suggestion that anyone is being asked to commit idolatry by showing such respect to what an object represents is very wide of the mark and quite offensive.

In similar vein there are those who object to Catholic priests being called “Father” because (they claim) “that is against what the Bible teaches”, but that is a subject for another time.

