

Thought for the Day: 22 – 28 June 2020 by Rev. Bill Church

Monday



Amazing as it may seem, we have passed the Summer Solstice and the days will grow shorter and the nights longer from now on. But, of course, we are still expecting several months of warmth, growth and fruitfulness. We will be,

in a way, living on the capital of the earlier lighter months. And, in the same way, are we living on capital in church and society? Are we putting as much in as we are taking out? Do we take too much for granted that there will be tolerance and order and that the systems we rely on will just continue. I don't just mean paying our dues (though it is noteworthy that the richer the individual or the bigger the corporation, the harder they try to avoid paying a fair share of tax). COVID has brought out wonderful examples of mutual help; but it has also exposed irresponsibility, buck-passing and gaps in social provision.

The commandment: 'Love your neighbour' has a very wide application.

Tuesday

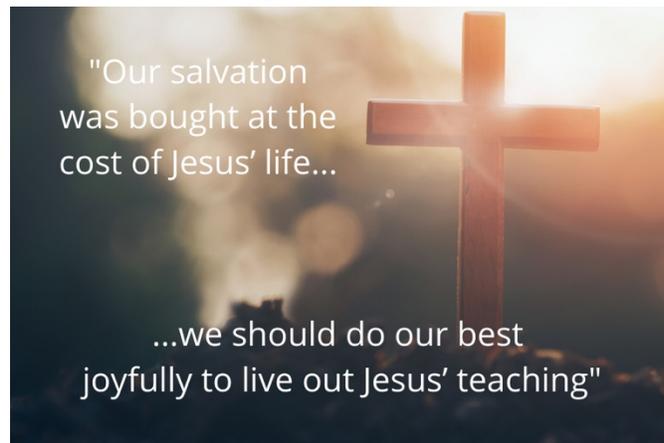
Today is the feast of St Alban. In a normal year, there would be great celebrations at St Albans Abbey, with giant puppets to re-enact what is the foundational story for this Diocese.



Alban made a spontaneous and brave decision to shelter a Christian priest being hunted in one of the last great Roman persecutions, though he himself was not a Christian. This act, which cost him his life, has echoed down the centuries. The site of his martyrdom outside the Roman city of Verulamium became venerated; may have remained a Christian oasis during the pagan invasions which created England; was endowed by Offa, King of Mercia (of Offa's Dyke fame!); and now is adorned by the magnificent Abbey church, rebuilt by the Normans using brick and tile from the ruins of Verulamium.

At the time, in the year 304 (if that was the date; nobody is sure), Alban's act may have been seen by the local officials and bystanders as pointless. History has proved them wrong.

Wednesday



Yesterday's Thought was about St Alban, who saved another at the cost of his own life. A modern example was when Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest, volunteered to die in an Auschwitz punishment in place of Franek Gajowniczek,

because he had a wife and children. Kolbe was starved and then killed; Franek survived the war and returned to an ordinary factory job in Poland. The post-war Communist government forbade him from speaking about Kolbe (which he was only able to do after 1989).

Our friend David Gooderson wrote a play, 'Kolbe's gift', which recounted Kolbe's martyrdom but centred on Franek's feeling that he had not done enough with his life – the 'Kolbe's gift' of the title - to justify the sacrifice involved; a feeling which I am sure Kolbe would never have entertained but which preyed on Franek's mind.

We are all, of course, in the same boat as Franek – our salvation was bought at the cost of Jesus' life. But I cannot believe that Jesus wants us to go round being anxious that we have not done enough to justify that sacrifice. What we should do is tell the story and do our best joyfully to live out Jesus' teaching.

Thursday

I have been given a book called 'Through the British Museum with the Bible', which guides you through the Museum to exhibits linked to episodes in the Bible.



It can't be used during lockdown, and it will never help you find Noah's Ark, but it is inherently interesting and does act to remind us that the people of the Bible lived in the real world. They had to deal with some difficult neighbours, including large and expansionist empires who occupied the land for most of the period; they underwent man-made and natural disasters far worse than any we have modernly encountered; they lacked the comforts and technology we enjoy; they suffered, and perpetrated, atrocities quite as bad in kind, if not in scale, as anything in the 20th Century. And yet they found time and motivation to strive after an understanding of God and to seek to worship him, thus making a background for the incarnation – for God With Us – which is the foundation of our worldwide faith.

Friday



A Thought for the Day some weeks ago by Rachel Stewart quoted a poem which mentioned 'lockdown hair'. Every Saturday, our son, Alfred, has been delivering supplies from the Hertford Rugby Club provisioning enterprise. His

hair had been getting longer and longer and then, one Saturday, he arrived with neat short hair.

It looked very professional – until he turned round and we saw a great bare patch at the back. He had bought himself some clippers and cut his own hair, but had miscalculated doing the back. It is not easy to cut your own hair!

Some things it is even harder to do for yourself, but we rely on them, lockdown or no lockdown. Clean water comes in, dirty water goes away; letters are collected and delivered; rubbish is collected; electricity flows, the telephone works, gas is available. Be thankful. It is not so for much of the world. Pray for them.

Saturday

When I was about 10, we had a family seaside holiday at Frinton.



Frinton then was known for not having any pubs, but it did have lots of butterflies; and I went round catching them in a net, chlorophorming them in a jam jar and pinning them on a board.

There were more butterflies then and collecting them was a recognised part of 'nature study'. Nowadays, it would be entirely unacceptable (quite apart from letting children handle chlorophorm) and my children and grandchildren would not be allowed to do it.

Even pleading the example of Alfred Russell Wallace, a Hertford notable and contributor with Darwin to forming an understanding of evolution, who funded his worldwide expeditions by collecting specimens from the wild for rich patrons, what I did was wrong.

Should I be barred for life from the Wildlife Trust?

I hope not. We cannot redo the past but we can learn from it. We must learn from it, otherwise we will just make the same mistakes all over again, and probably some new ones, too.

I am pleased that this year is proving very good for butterflies, which flutter in safety round our garden.

Sunday

The Collects set out in the Book of Common Prayer and in Common Worship are not always, or often, or ever, the high point of the service; added to which, I have never enjoyed the practice of chanting the Collect at Evening Prayer.

Sometimes, however, they strike a chord.

The BCP Collect for today, the Third Sunday after Trinity, includes:

'O Lord, we beseech thee... grant that we... may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities.'

There are, and will be, plenty of dangers and adversities facing us. Even when health risks are waning, the economic forecasts are alarming with predictions of massive shrinkage of jobs, opportunities and supplies and massive growth of debt.

In such times, the risk is that the weakest will suffer even more and extreme political voices will be more likely to be heard. There could be austerity on a wartime scale without any wartime spirit to bind us together. Do we really need 'comfort' in such times?



'Comfort' now tends to mean a comfy sofa or 'comfort food', a way of consoling ourselves and forgetting or hiding from what is going wrong.

That is not what the writers of the Collect meant – its first meaning was to strengthen, to encourage, to back us up to face down a challenge; not just to get through it as easily as possible.

Lord, strengthen us to face all the challenges ahead.