

**REFLECTIONS
OF A PARISHIONER**
Booklet 2



ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, NESTON

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DIAMOND JUBILEE

How glorious a day!
How wonderful an occasion!
How happy we were!
What Joy we felt!
The family of St. Winefride's
Gathered together
To celebrate the Jubilee
Of a man we have taken to our hearts.
How eminent our visitors,
A cardinal and two bishops
And a plenitude of priests.
How pleased we were to welcome
The family and friends of Fr Chris.
How happy he was!
Overwhelmed, but so happy!
And how humble he remained!
His final prayer at the end of the celebrations,
"Oh Lord, do not let me become arrogant,
Do not let this show of love and affection
Go to my head".
How grateful we are
For his dedication and his example!
Thank you, Lord

FATHER CHRIS



A few years ago, a retired priest began to attend mass here at St. Winefride's. He came because a friend told him that it was a lovely church and a nice parish. Very few of us knew him at that time and when this tall, quiet, dignified man was introduced to us as Monsignor Christopher Lightbound, we were not sure how to take him or even how to address him. To my knowledge, we had never had a Monsignor in our parish before, but he was a priest and he had family living in the area so we thought he should be alright, we'll give him a go.

We soon learned that he preferred just to be called Fr. Chris. We began to feel quite privileged because many of our masses were now being concelebrated by three and sometimes four priests.

We soon came to know and love this gentle, humble man. If you ask anyone "What do you think of Fr. Chris?" the usual answer you get is "Oh, he's such a nice man" and so he is, a very nice man, but he is so much more than that. He is kind and gentle and has a warm and gentle sense of humour and is always ready to help or advise, and of course, he is wise. I know that Fr. Courell, in the latter months of his illness was very grateful for the support that Fr Chris and Fr Denis gave him.

Deacon Mike is also grateful to Fr. Chris for he was mentored by him during his years of training for the diaconate and I believe Fr Chris still tells Mike what to do!

Mmm, then came Fr Ravi. He immediately adopted or should I say, perhaps, volunteered Fr. Chris to be his “curate” and Fr Chris filled his ministry very well. To begin the year of faith, he gave us a wonderful talk about the church before and after Vatican II. He is very popular with the children when he says mass at school. They seem to surround him asking questions and telling him stories. As is his way, Fr. Ravi often puts him on a spot but Fr. Chris always responds wonderfully. He is very spiritual and most mornings he attends Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Morning Prayer before concelebrating mass. In the afternoons he is often found in church sitting quietly, praying.

Fr Chris is also quite an historian. He has written a number of essays for the “Catholic Voice” on the history of the church in Cheshire and Shrewsbury. Last year he compiled them into a beautiful illustrated booklet entitled “Floreat Salopia”. He may have got the title from the pub at the top of Hinderton Road which not so long ago was known by the same name (English translation—Shrewsbury Arms, now the Hinderton Arms). For St. Winefride’s, Fr Chris has produced a beautifully coloured leaflet entitled “A Tour Around St. Winefride’s Church”, which highlights and explains the many treasures we have in our wonderful church, such as the vestments that are believed to have been worn by St. John Plessington, the beautiful stained glass windows and the lovely and rare Stations of the Cross to name but a few.

There are celebrities such as Terry Wogan, Bruce Forsythe and Esther Rantzen who have so endeared themselves to the people of this country that they have come to be recognised as National Treasures. I think that I can safely say on behalf of this parish that Fr Chris has so endeared himself to us all and so enriched our lives here in St. Winefride’s that he has become our own Parish Treasure.

MINISTRY

When I was first asked to read at mass, although I was in my early forties, I was very shy, self-conscious and had little self confidence. However I agreed. After I had read a couple of times, I realised that I could read quite well and that I had a voice and could project it. I was exhilarated and wanted to read again. At that time everything in the parish seemed to go through Griff and he would choose the readers before mass. I must have impressed him as he called on me more and more. There was no rota of readers and whoever was asked had no time to prepare. Although I found that I was able to read at a moments notice, I felt also that I could not understand or do justice to the scriptures without any preparation beforehand. I therefore began to study and prepare the Sunday readings in advance in case I was asked to read.

I must have impressed Fr. Courell for he told me that I didn't just read the scriptures but that I proclaimed them. He also invited me to be a Eucharistic Minister. Again I doubted myself and hesitated but after talking it over with him I agreed. I cannot tell you how much joy it gave me being allowed to take communion to people who were so close to God. I experienced an overwhelming feeling of joy; a kind of frustration, but what a wonderful, sweet frustration. I felt that I was like a deep well that people could come and draw from, and I was filled to bursting point with love. I wanted to share that love with everyone. People, family and friends, colleagues were all drawing from that well.

Soon after I was asked to join a group of catechists in order to help parents of first communicants so that they in turn could help their children to prepare for the day they would receive Jesus in the sacrament for the first time. This again involved some study and research on my part during which I discovered St. John of the Cross who, in his poetry, talked about the "Dark Night of the Soul". Although at

the time I didn't quite understand it, sometime later I experienced my own dark night, I felt that so many had been drawing so much from me that I had little left to give. I felt empty and dry. I wondered if I was losing my faith. Fr. Courell consoled me saying that it was not uncommon and that my moments of disbelief were rather moments of awe, a realisation of the incomprehensible greatness of God.

I am much older now and no longer timid and fearful but confident and full of hope. I am aware of my strengths as well as my weaknesses and try to use them to the best of my ability, joyfully, enthusiastically and with integrity. I take no credit for anything I may have achieved. I have not navigated my own course of life. There has always been a guiding hand steering me along the way, watching over me and gently drawing me back whenever I have strayed or felt lost: keeping me safe as I journeyed from one stage to the next. From the moment I first said yes, I started on a learning curve, not a steep one, but a gradual, gentle, almost imperceptible curve. It is only when I now look back that I can see how much I am changed.

*Marana tha. Come, Lord Jesus, come.
Enter into my heart, teach me.*

INNOCENCE

There is a film, “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” which I have seen advertised but have not watched. It is about the case of a man who lives his life in reverse beginning as an old man and reversing through life to childhood. I cannot comment on the film but I am intrigued by the idea. If only we could begin life with all the knowledge, experience and wisdom that we gain in later life and then use it to retain that innocence of our childhood throughout our adulthood. Only the very young are innocent. As we grow older we become tarnished with prejudice, resentment and distrust. We are shaped by the things that happen to us. No matter how we react to a bad situation, positively or negatively, we inevitably become aware of evil in our world. We succumb to temptation and we lose our innocence. I believe there is only one way to reverse this process and that is to submit to God’s will; to surrender our own will to his. That is not easy. It takes a great deal of faith, trust and courage but we can start in small ways. The first step is to say yes.

When we take our first faltering step forward out of the ranks and volunteer to be Christ’s witness, we step out from the shadows into the limelight for all to see. We do not have to volunteer but, when we do, we commit ourselves to doing God’s work and the spotlight is on us. We can no longer work in secret; we must be seen to do what we do for we do not do it for ourselves, we do it for God: We do not seek praise or recognition but only to serve. Therefore we should be glad to be seen in order to proclaim the name of Jesus. St. John the Baptist was a humble man who chose to live alone in the desert but he came out of the desert to the banks of the Jordan where many people gathered, in order to prepare the way for Jesus.

I have come to believe that it is false modesty to try to do God's work without being seen for then we are doing it for ourselves, perhaps to salve our consciences or because we are afraid of criticism, and not for God. Once we have stepped into the limelight we cannot step back into the shadows for that would be an embarrassment for ourselves but more importantly a denial of Christ. His light cannot shine through us if we remain hidden.

We are inclined to seek success thinking that it will give us power and influence, respect and esteem and so help us to do God's work better and therefore become closer to God. What we often fail to see is that if we first seek to be closer to God, He will freely give us all these gifts.

*Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you
All things pass away
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
The one who has God
Lacks nothing;
God alone suffices*

Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

A CONVERSATION WITH JESUS

Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will.

Here I am, Lord. Thank you for waiting here for me. I love this time I spend with you in this holy place. It's so quiet and peaceful. I know how much I have changed since I started coming to visit you like this. I feel so much stronger and more confident, but... I am also more aware of my sinfulness and my weakness.

Yes, Lord, I know that I must know my weakness for it is in my weakness that I turn to you for help and it is then that you make me strong, but it also makes me realise how shallow I am. When I am here with you I feel so full of love and devotion, but when I leave you and go out of this place, I go out into the world and all the other things that are in my life crowd into my mind and I forget about you.

Jesus, I realise you are still with me when I go out, you are always with me but I take you so much for granted. I'm sorry. My mind gets so full of worldly things and it's only when I am struggling that I turn to you and say "Jesus help me" or when something good happens, I say "Thank you Jesus". When I am tempted, I say "Save me, Jesus" and when I do something wrong, I say "I'm sorry Jesus".

Thank you for understanding and making allowances for me. I'm sure you even make excuses for my lack of attention to you, but I should try harder to find a time and a place during the day to be with you. I will try harder and I will try to make you a part of everything I do.

Oh Jesus, you have never asked too much of me. You have only asked that I love you and love all those you have put around me, and I do, but I feel guilty when I see and hear of others who have so much suffering in their lives and I realise how blessed my life has been.

Oh yes, there has been some suffering in my life, the loss of loved ones, some hardships, some disappointments but my cross has been small compared to the crosses that some others have to bear and through all my difficulties you have been with me and you inspired me and made me stronger.

O Jesus, I have only to put my trust in you and you will help me to face any problems that are put before me. I will sit here quietly with you now for I do trust you.

*O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine,
All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.*



VOCATION

I have sometimes wondered why my life has been so blessed and why have I not been tested as others have. There has been some sorrow in my life and some difficult times but in every sorrow there has been inspiration; for every difficulty, God has provided an answer; for every need, God has provided enough for us to cope. There are so many others who have to live their lives with suffering and hardship. I do not seek to suffer nor do I crave martyrdom for I do not think that I am brave enough,

For most of his life, Jesus was called to be a dutiful son. He honoured his mother and father. While he was still a teenager, he became aware that a future vocation awaited him, that of a teacher and a healer. Joseph taught him the skills of carpentry but the family must also have read and studied the Holy Scriptures. When Joseph died, Jesus became the head of the family and provided for his mother. When the time was right, he was called to a new rabbinical ministry, to heal the sick, to call sinners to repent and to suffer and die.

I think that at different stages in our lives we are called to follow various vocations, ones that are appropriate for whatever stage we are at. As children we respect our parents and are guided by them. As adolescents we learn to think for ourselves and to make our own decisions. As we enter adulthood, some are called to the priesthood or to the religious life. Others are called to be teachers, doctors, nurses, carers, policemen, fire-fighters, servants of the people. Most get a job and begin to look for a life-partner.

We may not always consider our occupation as vocational but we can make it so by doing it to the best of our ability and offering our efforts to God. We should look at marriage as a life-long vocation for we are committing ourselves to loving and cherishing another for the rest of our lives and promising to put our chosen partner's needs before our own.

If we are blessed with children, that is a wonderful vocation. Fr. Courell used to say that parenthood was a truly awesome vocation for parents held the future in their hands. They are the children's first teachers. It is a huge responsibility but a very rewarding one.

There is a saying, "Unmerited suffering is redemptive". I think that suffering is a vocation but I do not think that God inflicts it, nor do I believe that He chooses people to suffer but I believe that those who do suffer pain, hardship and sorrow are given graces to enable them to accept their suffering with patience and dignity. I have been truly inspired by those who suffer and by the saintliness of those who care for them.

A vocation is an opportunity to serve God and the community. As we get older and perhaps have more time to offer, more opportunities present themselves. We do not have to take the opportunity to do something but if we do we are much rewarded.

SURRENDER

Everything I do, every word I utter, every thought that comes into my mind, has an effect. It is like a pebble thrown into a pond whose ripples spread far and wide. Whatever I say, whatever I do, whatever I think makes me different; becomes a part of my make up. Of course I have a choice. I can choose to do or I can choose to not do. I have freedom of choice but freewill is not free. Whatever I choose to do or whatever I choose to not do has a consequence. Perhaps that consequence will only be felt in my own life but like the ripple in the pond it may reach to another's life. I may never be conscious of any change but it will still be a part of my history.

When I claim that it is my choice, it is often in retaliation to some, unjust in my opinion, accusation that has been levelled against me or an attempt to justify something that I myself have done. It may be to counter the words or actions of others who are trying to control or manipulate me or to establish my God-given human right to be free. I can choose to resist or I can choose to submit but always, whatever I choose, it will affect not only my life but also the other's life.

Freedom of choice, therefore, is an awesome responsibility. How can I be sure to make the right choice? Will it bring happiness and peace to my life and the lives of others? I can think of only one way, surrender; to surrender my will completely to the will of God; to give back to God what he has given to me, but how hard that is to do. It takes great courage. to surrender my will to his is not an excuse to do nothing. Jesus carried out his father's will in a violent and shocking way when he dismissed the money lenders and the merchants from the temple. I too must be prepared to fight evil when I am confronted with it. But how do I know what the will of God is? By considering carefully all my actions; by thinking before I speak and by trusting that Jesus is always there at my side to help; by praying that he will always show me the right thing to do. However, I know that I am weak and lacking in courage. I know

that I will make mistakes and pray that my mistakes will not hurt anyone. Perhaps I will never be able to completely surrender until my last great Amen.

*Lead kindly light amid th' encircling gloom;
Lead thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead thou me on!
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.*

John Henry Newman

SIPPING SORROW FROM THE SPOON OF GRIEF

*“A dead-end kid, free-wheeling down the hill to failure
and sipping sorrow from the spoon of grief”*

I was born into a large family and grew up in the difficult times after WW2 but I didn't realise that we were poor. Although things were hard, I never felt deprived. I passed “the scholarship” and began my secondary education at a prestigious catholic grammar school. It still did not occur to me that the majority of pupils attending that school came from families that were better off than mine. It was only towards the end of my time there, when I had to decide whether to leave school at 16 or go on to further education and possibly University, that I realised the difference. Although my mother urged me to stay on, I felt I had no option other than to leave school, get a job and contribute to the family budget. The above quotation is how the Physics and Chemistry master described me.

When I started work at G.H.Lee (John Lewis), my mother was concerned that I would never be able to do well in sales as I did not have “the gift of the gab”. But I believe that selling is as much a vocation as any other. A good salesperson discovers the customer's needs by asking questions and then tries to help them by providing the information that will allow them to make the decision that will be right for them. A manager of a store in which I worked, a man whose integrity I was never sure of, once told me I had no charisma. My reply was “Perhaps not, but people trust me”.

I have never felt that my life was at a dead-end. There has always been a light leading me on and a gentle hand guiding me forward. I think that during my life there have been times when I have free-wheeled and not striven as hard as I should have and there has

been some sorrow in my life and grief at the loss of loved ones but with the sadness there was always hope, consolation and inspiration. Materially, I may not have been as successful as some of my peers but that may be because I have lacked ambition which I consider a blessing rather than a handicap. Of course, I have always wanted to provide a happy and stable home for my family and have worked hard to do so, but I have never craved or coveted what others have. Although throughout my working life I was paid on a commission basis, financial reward was never my motivation. I have always believed that if I did my work to the best of my ability the rewards would automatically follow.

I do not need to understand all the physics and chemistry of my life. I have a family that love me. I live in a community that shows me respect and affection and I have faith in a God who is generous, loving and merciful. What more do I need? I am content.

*Lord, God of Hosts,
Happy the man who trusts in you.*



A FEW MORE REFLECTIONS OF A PARISHIONER

Author's Note:

I would like to thank Fr. Ravi for allowing me to publish these reflections and for all his encouragement, guidance, leadership and especially his thought provoking homilies.

Thanks also to Helen who has been an enormous help in putting my reflections on the web site and has helped me to prepare these booklets.

I thank, also, all of you who have read them and said such nice things about them. I take no credit for anything I write, they are simply the thoughts that come into my head while I am trying to pray. I'm not sure if they are distractions or if they are inspired from above but I seek no praise or recognition for them and certainly no reward.

Many of you have offered a donation towards the cost but, although I am very grateful for the offer, I would feel uncomfortable accepting anything, however, if you wish to give a small donation to CAFOD on my behalf, that would be wonderful. I intend to continue to write as long as the inspiration is still there and as long as you enjoy reading my humble offerings.

Many thanks, Tony

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