

Welcome to the August edition of Gus's Gossip, our monthly newsletter.

From Fr Clive: Society of the Holy Cross (SSC)

You may have wondered what SSC stands for after my name or why some priests wear a small gold cross on the cassocks or lapel.

The Society of the Holy Cross - or SSC from the Latin Societas Sanctae Crucis is a Congregation of priests in the Anglican Communion, who live and minister under a common Rule of Life.



There are currently over 1,000 members around the world in parishes, missions, chaplaincies, schools and other areas of pastoral ministry, committed to witnessing to the Cross of Christ by their lives and ministry.

The Society of the Holy Cross (SSC) was founded in London in 1855 by a small group of Anglo-Catholic priests led by Father Charles Lowder.

At a time when the Catholic Revival in the Church of England was threatened by persecution and misunderstanding, these priests came together for support, mutual prayer and encouragement. Fr Lowder spelled out the objects of SSC:

"To defend and strengthen the spiritual life of the clergy, to defend the faith of the Church, and to carry on and aid Mission work both at home and abroad".

The members of this society, meeting together as they did in prayer and conference, were deeply impressed with the evils existing in the Church, and saw also, in the remedies adopted by St Vincent de Paul, the hope of lessening them.

Priests of the Society live under a common Rule and meet together in their local SSC Chapters every month or two for prayer, Mass and some kind of study or conversation. Presiding over the Society worldwide is a Master-General who has a special responsibility to ensure an on-going fidelity among the Brethren to the spirit of the Society.

SSC is not a devotional guild, but takes its stance upon a shared vision:
'a disciplined priestly life fashioned after a definite spiritual rule.'

It is this Rule of Life which unites the Brethren in their various priestly ministries and lives. They are required to:

'consider their obligation to the Society as a close spiritual bond...which takes precedence to that of any other voluntary society.'

This obligation includes a commitment to attend local SSC Chapter meetings and annual Regional and Provincial Synods. The life of the Society is experienced primarily through the local Chapter, and attendance at Chapter is of obligation unless prevented by genuine pastoral duties. Priests of the Society can be recognized by the small gold lapel cross that they generally wear - see above.

On it is inscribed the motto of the Society - in hoc signo vinces - in this sign, conquer!

Lent with the NHS - Fr Andrew Davis

When I was admitted to hospital with an infection in my leg on 10 June (2017) I didn't realise that I would be in three hospitals successively for six weeks. As time moved on I began to see the days (just over forty) as a sort of secular Lent. I was in the Medway Maritime, Charing Cross and St Mary's Paddington. As I write I'll combine them into one experience, mainly based on St Mary's.

I thought of St Matthew's account of Jesus' time in the desert (4:1-11) and couldn't help comparing this with my own experience and seeing some of the similarities in a more secular way

The hospital was like the desert - a vast place full of voices and noises, of people constantly on the move both day and night in which the individual was a very small person. It was a place of apprehensions and fears - the discomfort following treatment, confusion about what was happening and not understanding all the medical terminology, being away from home and the after-effect of an anaesthetic on ones 'regular bodily system'. Despite this it was possible, especially in the long night hours, to be entirely on one's own and to think and reflect on immediate concerns and on wider universal themes.

Every Christian uses Lent to try to face and overcome temptation. "...by thy Baptism, Fasting and Temptation, *Good Lord, deliver us*" (The Prayer Book Litany). My first temptation was to feel sorry for myself but as I thought about my predicament (following a motorcycle accident the previous year) I knew that it was entirely my own fault and, looking at the other men in the ward, I could have been in a much worse position. The second temptation was to cut myself off from the wider world and live in the cocoon of the daily round of the hospital and its programme. Since I left Ealing I had been feeling in the wilderness as a priest without a parish. I was looking forward to starting at St Luke's Gillingham (on 11 June!) and helping fr James at Higham (my local parish) when he was away. I had to accept that this was not going to happen. I didn't tell anyone in the hospital that I was a priest but they all seemed to know in due course. The matron apologised for not calling me father. Another senior nurse asked me to bless her for her forthcoming marriage.

As I lay in the ward it came home to me that wherever I was, at the high altar at St Mary's Bourne St, or seated in splendour in my stall at St Paul's or here in bed, the priest never ceases to be a priest even if he isn't where he would wish to be. When I stepped down as a full time parish priest I complained to a secular friend that I missed being the centre of attention. Another temptation in the hospital was to talk and think solely about myself (even more than normal!). My friend came to see me in the hospital and pointed out that at least I was the centre of attention again! I thought about this. Visitors, friends, family and parishioners, and other people in the ward, without realising it, helped me turn the attention away from myself.

Jesus fasted in the forty days. I had no intention to fast but the hospital fare made the time feel like a time of abstinence and fasting. I planned a daily diet as though I was in a monastic house (not like the French Benedictine houses where I've stayed in the past and eaten very well!). Visitors kindly brought me mountains of biscuits, fruit, chocolates, drinks and nice things. I was most grateful but couldn't cope with them all. My brother took them away for later consumption or redistribution. I realised about the fifth week that I hadn't had any alcohol or wine, and I hadn't missed it. When I left the hospital I had lost over two stones. I had never been able to achieve that through the liturgical fasts or diets!

Another abstinence was not being able to go Sunday and daily mass. I was very grateful to the priests who brought the sacraments to me each week, especially to Fr John Hunter from St Stephen's Gloucester Rd. Fr John is tall and gaunt. One day when he came into the ward my elderly neighbour in the next bed sat up in alarm thinking that his time had come! Thanks to the iPad I was able to recite the Divine Office each day. I wondered what the other inmates would have thought if they knew that they were in a place sanctified albeit silently by the daily prayer of the whole Church, ascending to heaven from their midst. Some of the language in the male ward was very profane but the silent prayer seemed to neutralise it and rise above it! Everyone who has been in hospital for any length of time knows how long and sleepless the nights can be. I was extremely grateful to two

Ealing friends who brought me a radio and headphones. This meant that I could listen to music in the dark hours. That the radio stations continue throughout the night is such a blessing. I also tried to pray in the night and use my long experience of attempting 'the prayer of silence'. However, the length of the night and the frustration at not being able to sleep in such a comfortable hospital bed, seemed overwhelming. I have learnt by experience that saying the rosary is a good way of falling asleep. After only one Our Father and six Hail Mary's you soon drop off. I tried this and it worked at first. However, not wishing to misuse the rosary, I also made sure that I knew by heart all the events of Our Lord's life included in the four sets of the Mysteries. I tried to say one of the Mysteries each night with a specific group of people as my intention. Then I found, rather to my secular chagrin, that I was staying awake to the very end of the set of particular mysteries! I began to realise what a wonderful tool for prayer the rosary is, combining verbal prayer, bodily prayer, counting the beads, and reflection on the cycle of human redemption revealed in the life of the Saviour. I felt that even after all these years as a priest I had learnt something new and enriching about the life of prayer. The monks of the Benedictine monastery of Le Barroux in France say in the introduction to their rule that they pray in the night because it is a time when "thieves operate, plots are hatched and lust rages". I didn't exactly feel like that in these circumstances but I could see the opportunity of sanctifying the long night hours with prayer and trying to turn sleeplessness into watching for the Lord "I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel, who even at night directs my heart" (Ps 16).

When the devil had finished with Jesus "the angels ministered unto him". For me the ministering angels were the hospital staff - consultants, doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, ward personnel, so many involved in the daily care of a patient and all so dedicated and thorough. Equally ministering as angels were all the family, friends and parishioners who came to visit me, or phoned me from faraway places. I was very pleased to see them all and resolved to be a better friend in the future. I felt humbled to know so many wonderful friends. Their visits were so helpful in enduring such a long time in hospital.

I had stopped thinking about coming home but when I was given a release time I was counting the hours to freedom. As the ambulance took me through the London suburbs on a busy Friday afternoon towards Rochester it was a sort of resurrection experience - moving on from the 42 days in the hospitals. At the end of Lent comes the joyful celebration of the Lord's Resurrection. The Liturgical Lent and my NHS Lent are outwardly not the same, but there were many similarities. Both are very real experiences within the same person. I feel that the sacred and the so called secular are intertwined and God imbues all aspects of our lives with his saving grace. Deep in the puzzling, joyful and painful mysteries of life, his will is in all things.

Profile of a Parishioner: Carol Summers:

I was born and brought up in Highbridge, Somerset, near to the lovely seaside town of Burnham On Sea. I attended St John's Primary and then Bridgewater Grammar School for Girls, leaving at 16 to go straight into employment. I worked in the laboratory at Unigate Foods Ltd. but left Somerset when I was 18 for the excitement of the city. I worked for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for all of 6 months, living in civil service accommodation in Kensington, before deciding that office work drove me crazy. I then went back into laboratory work with Courage brewery and qualified as a microbiologist. It was here that I met my best friend and soul mate, Bob who worked for Courage's as a lorry driver.

Bob was born and brought up in Bermondsey and had many jobs before joining Courage's e.g. on the docks and in a furriers. We married in 1978, moved to Plumstead and went on to have four lovely boys, James, Robert, Gary and Ryan. Unfortunately, after having James both myself and Bob were made redundant from Courage's. Bob became a driver for the Government Car Service and I began my career in childcare, first as a childminder, which enabled me to be at home with my own children, then, after moving to Belvedere in 1987, as a Preschool Assistant at St Augustine's Preschool, and finally as Tutor/Assessor for Skills for Growth in Bexleyheath. Bob retired in 2009 and I finally retired, after 35 years in childcare, in 2015. Myself and Bob now provide childcare for our five lovely grandchildren.

As a child, in my home town of Highbridge, community life revolved around the church and myself and my sister attended Sunday school and then, as we got older, church services on a regular basis. Unfortunately, I was a rebellious teenager and refused to become confirmed and attend church after the age of 14. However, I never forgot the important Christian values instilled in me by my parents and, when my eldest joined the scouts, myself and Bob attended church Parade at St Augustine's, to support him, and have attended ever since. I was finally confirmed with my eldest son by Father Robert Featherstone.

A Faithful Journey by Margaret Raymond

I moved to Belvedere in 1972. I was originally from North London, growing up just a stone's throw from Finsbury Park. I met my husband Tom and we married in 1967. We lived in Harringay for five years. We eventually decided to buy our first house. With both my parents gone, I had no ties to the area. Tom was originally from South East London and hadn't really settled north of the river so we decided to move south, and found our first house in Kingswood Avenue.

My mother, in her younger days, was a keen Methodist. I was brought up as a Methodist and was baptised and married in our local Church.

Having moved to Belvedere, we made friends with our new neighbours Mr and Mrs Brackstone. Their son and daughter in law (Ron and Eileen) moved in shortly afterwards and we became close friends.

Our son Edward was born in 1973 followed soon after by our daughter Claire in 1974. Both were baptised at St Augustine's. I attended church with the children while they were younger, mainly for the big Christian festivals, Easter, Remembrance and Christmas.

When our children started school, I became friends with the other mums. One of them was Mavis Stagg, Fr Russell's mum. When Edward was seven years old, Eileen Brackstone, with Fr Ken Cheeseman, started the 6th Erith Cub Pack. Edward was one of the original six cubs.

At this time, I belonged to a women's group that met in the old church hall. Mavis Stagg was a member. She was also the Brown Owl of the 2nd Belvedere Brownies. She commented that Claire was old enough to be one of her Brownies. This is how I began my worship at St Augustine's.

I began to attend church parades but after a while, Edward announced that Fr Ken had asked him to join the church choir. I asked him if he was sure and told him that it meant quite a commitment. I told him that I was not prepared to go every Sunday. Within a few weeks, Claire was also in the choir and I found myself attending every Sunday.

Not being a regular attendee, and with my Methodist upbringing, I found the high church Anglo Catholic services difficult at first, but gradually began to appreciate them.

Edward, Claire and I were confirmed during Fr Len's ministry. I have found very good friends and fellowship while I have been at St Augustine's. I have served on the PCC and the finance side. I have helped in the plentiful fundraising events held at the church and, have also taken part in some of the fund raising efforts at our home. Who could forget a Raymond family cheese and wine party?

It has been a great source of joy to me that several of our family occasions have been celebrated at St Augustine's. Our daughter Claire and Bill's wedding took place at St Augustine's and our five grandchildren were also baptised there too.

In recent years, my family and I have been extremely grateful for the support and friendship that we have received following the loss of Tom. It has been a struggle for all involved I'm sure, but made a little easier each time we attend.

(Look out for Part 2 of Margaret's memoirs next month)

Hymn Top Ten - Donna Ducker

A lot of us are really missing singing hymns in church at the moment. It is said that if you sing hymns you pray twice. The Dean of Canterbury in a Morning Prayer reflection last week said that he felt so sad if he even heard the word 'singing' at the moment because we are being deprived of it. So I thought it would be a good idea to ask people to tell us about their favourite hymns and why they like them so much. Let's make this a regular for Gus's Gossip.....

I've sung hymns since I was a small child, although I didn't always understand the meanings. I think that I was about 7 when I realised that the great Passiontide hymn was not 'All Glory Laud and Donna' - I thought it was my hymn!

As stated in a previous article, St Andrew's, Bostall Heath was my family church and the late 1970s the then priest-in charge, the wonderful Canon Alan Vousden, introduced a new (gasp!) supplementary hymn book called 'One Hundred Hymns for Today'. There was much mumbling and grumbling around the 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' diehards so Alan brought in someone (I think it was Martin How) from the Royal School of Church Music to give a talk about the new book. The speaker decided to teach us two new hymns from the book - 'All my hope on God is founded' - definitely in my Top Twenty and 'We have a gospel to proclaim' which is my all-time favourite hymn.

I was immediately taken by the latter because of the jolly waltz time and that it had an interesting alto line, so many hymns have boring alto lines! I then began to take more notice of the words and to me it just sums up the Christian faith - 'We have a gospel to proclaim, good news to all throughout the earth...' It then goes on to tell the story of Jesus's birth, death, resurrection and ascension. My favourite verse - no glamorisation of Jesus's birth here: 'Tell of his birth at Bethlehem, not in a royal house or hall, but in a stable dark and dim, the Word made flesh, a light for all.' I love the way the words of St John are used to proclaim Jesus as the light in the darkness. The final verse I don't think can be bettered as a hymn of praise 'Now we rejoice to name him King, Jesus is Lord of all the earth. This gospel message we proclaim, we sing His glory, tell His worth'. It's a hymn we don't often sing at St Augustine's so is all the more special when we do sing it.

Another great favourite is 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind'. The words 'In deeper reverence praise' resound with my transition from middle of the road Anglicanism to Anglo-Catholicism. I believe worship should be reverent and mysterious. The second verse immediately gives us an image of the calling of the first disciples. My favourite verse in this hymn is one that I use as prayer in times of stress as I can think of no better words to ask for help in being calm. 'Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease; Take from our souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace...'

Other huge favourites include 'Angel voices ever singing', 'Christ triumphant', 'Love divine all loves excelling', 'O praise ye the Lord', 'My song is love unknown', 'When I survey the wondrous cross', 'O thou who camest from above' and 'For all the saints' but there are many more associated with people and places. 'Thine be the glory' was my late mother's favourite hymn, 'The church's one foundation' my late sister's and I can never sing these without hearing them singing too. 'Colours of Day' and 'Shine Jesus Shine' take me straight back to Trinity School hall, where they were particular favourites of the pupils in morning acts of worship.

Now it is over to you. Please write a little about your favourite hymns or list your top ten. We will try and make this a regular feature for Gus's Gossip. For the December edition we will do the same but with Christmas Carols!

If you would like to contribute this or any article please email or give them to Fr Clive at frclive@tiscali.co.uk or Donna at staugustineofcanterburypa@gmail.com.

Gus's Gossip will be published for the first weekend of every month. The deadline is the preceding Thursday.

TRUSTED TRADERS....

In a new regular back page we recommend local traders who have given good service to members of the church. If you have a recommendation please let Fr Clive or Donna know.

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Window Cleaning

Fr Clive recently engaged Scott Dillnutt who he met many years ago when chaplain of Trinity School. He did a great job on the vicarage windows 07780 439436 email: scottdillnutt@yahoo.co.uk

Garage

Gilbert Rd Service Station (opposite church) has re-opened for servicing and MOTs....they sponsor our mass sheet so do support them. They service Fr Clive's car and have always proved efficient and reliable. Phone 020 8311 4465.

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The deadline for the September edition of Gus's Gossip is Thursday 27th August.