

'Give Blood and Receive The Spirit'

Fr Peter CSWG reflects on the call to the religious life

MARK WILSON

Instructing His disciples at the Last Supper, the Lord gave them this reminder: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you' (John 15.16). For some whom He calls, that choosing will include an invitation to follow Him in a particular way: 'If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come follow me' (Matt 19:16).

It is important to know that monks and nuns do not *choose* their way of life: rather, that it is chosen for them. Often when someone is talking about exploring the religious life, people can respond with: 'why on earth choose that?' as though it were something *they* had thought they would rather like to do. It rarely occurs to people that pursuing such a call might involve overcoming significant hurdles, hesitations, and uncertainties – and not least those of family members.

Sacrifice

It seems to me that the kind of response above happens because we so quickly forget that our Christian faith is rooted in sacrifice – in a 'giving of ourselves' to God. That was the truth that underpinned the whole of Jesus Christ's earthly life, culminating in the final offering of Himself on the Cross. It was the reality, too, of the life of His Mother. Sacrifice for Mary meant a following of her Son, not knowing where it would take her. Her 'be it unto me according to your word' thus became a benchmark of faithfulness for all of us.

Mary gave herself to God in complete trust, not knowing what lay ahead. It was 'blind faith' in the *positive* sense of those words: not as something irrational or unthinking; but a willingness to receive whatever God sent in the way of circumstances, and to find in that the will of God for herself.



The statue of Bishop Charles Gore, founder of the Community of the Resurrection, outside Birmingham Cathedral

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She is supremely the one who hears the word of God and obeys it (cf Luke 11.28).

In the same way the Mothers and Fathers of the Oxford Movement sought to follow Mary's way and imitate her faith, in accordance with their capacity. Most readers of *New*

Directions will rejoice at being in parishes where the fruits of these endeavours are manifold. The Catholic faith is practised and the sacraments are celebrated, and true teaching is handed on. We are the beneficiaries of all this because of *sacrifices*

made by those courageous pioneers in the faith, men and women living out their willingness to walk in the way of Mary's faithful obedience.

Prayer

The life of prayer can correctly be termed 'sacrifice.' Prayer is not simply an act of piety, or a box to be ticked. Prayer involves a giving of ourselves – the whole person – to God and is at the very heart of faith, giving direction to our life. Prayer begins in relationship with the Lord, though the first thing He teaches His disciples when they ask about prayer is to address God as 'Father.' Over time, prayer becomes relationship and communion with all the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

So the Church encourages everyone to pray. She also blesses men and women whose calling is to dedicate their whole life to that: to persevere and to grow in a life of prayer. Monks and nuns represent a vital constituent of the Church's life, not so that everyone else can get on with evangelism and service; but as a reminder to everyone that prayer is pivotal in the Christian life.

Prayer at the heart of our Christian life makes faith come alive and increase within us. When we realise what is entailed in prayer – a growing in relationship – it takes on something of the nature of a journey. It is one we all have to make: we realise no one can do it for us. Prayer itself convinces us it is truly *the* way forward.

Vocations Conference

In October 2015, RooT (Religious of Orthodox Tradition) pioneered a Vocations Conference for young people at St Mary's, Wellingborough. Over half of those who attended are continuing to pursue their next step forward: as postulants, novices, or in a consecrated life. It is planning to hold another conference in the early autumn, this time in the Northern Province. Details are presently being finalised, and will appear shortly. Please support and encourage anyone you know who may be thinking about religious life in one form or another to attend.

www.sswsh.com/Root.php

When we understand the necessity of prayer for the Church, we see at the same time the need for communities of prayer to support one another at the heart of the Church's life. That will mean encouraging vocations to such communities, and making it high on the list of our priorities. For instance, when a man or woman has a general sense of calling from God, but there is no clear call to a particular ministry, only a desire to serve Him in His Church in some way, He *may* be calling him or her – or you – to the religious life.

Growth

The truth of the words 'no growth without sacrifice' is written all over the history of the Oxford Movement. Whether we turn to Dr Pusey, or Fr Lowder, or Fr Mackonochie, or the numerous sisters who nursed the plague and cholera victims, or any of the heroes and heroines of that Movement, we will find sacrifice at the heart of it all. For when people give themselves sacrificially, the Spirit comes. There is a saying from the Desert Fathers that echoes that truth: 'Give blood and receive the Spirit.'

'Let it be to me according to your word.' Mary gave herself, not knowing what lay before her. Thus she stands for the whole Church as an example of faith, and trust in the faithfulness and goodness of God. Every professed religious experiences, in however small a degree, something of the character of such commitment when they bind themselves in lifelong promises.

Our Church

One of the important tasks of the Catholic movement in the Church of England is to remind her of the importance of Mary's example. How will others learn her significance to faith, if *we* are not living and teaching it?

By the same token, who will convince others about the centrality of prayer and religious life, if not that part of our Church where its revival sprang up? We are the inheritors of a goodly heritage, and should be passionate about the need for monks and nuns praying at the heart of the Church. If we are to commend it to others it is important for us to be supporting that life, participating in it, and encouraging others to share in it.

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It would not be right simply to be content that Evangelicals and Charismatics are now newly discovering the power and vitality of a common life of prayer for the well-being of the Church. At the heart of all religious life is a Catholic and orthodox

understanding of sacrifice. Without that core element that first inspired religious life underpinning it, how would it flourish? For religious life to continue to grow in our Church, it is vital it is there in its traditional expression – supported and encouraged with conviction by clergy and laity alike. **ND**

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The Society

under the patronage of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Hilda

Chrim Masses 2016

Bishops of the Society will be celebrating the following Chrim Masses:

Richborough	Wednesday 16th March	7.30pm	S Hugh, Eyres Monsell, Leicester
Richborough	Saturday 19th March	11.00am	Portsmouth Cathedral
Beverley	Sunday 20th March	6.00pm	S Aidan, Grangetown, Sunderland
Wakefield	Sunday 20th March	6.00pm	S Paul, Barnsley
Burnley	Sunday 20th March	6.00pm	Holy Trinity, Tarleton
Beverley	Monday 21st March	12.00noon	S Hilda, Grangetown, Middlesbrough
Richborough	Monday 21st March	12.00noon	Chelmsford Cathedral
Ebbsfleet	Monday 21st March	2.00pm	Exeter Cathedral
Beverley	Tuesday 22nd March	11.30am	Manchester Cathedral
Chichester	Tuesday 22nd March	12.00noon	Chichester Cathedral*
Ebbsfleet	Tuesday 22nd March	12.00noon	Bristol Cathedral
Fulham	Tuesday 22nd March	11.00am	S Andrew, Holborn
Richborough	Tuesday 22nd March	12.00noon	Canterbury Cathedral
Beverley	Wednesday 23rd March	12.00noon	Worksop Priory
Ebbsfleet	Wednesday 23rd March	11.30am	Lichfield Cathedral
Richborough	Wednesday 23rd March	12.00noon	Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham

*with renewal of ministerial vows - for all the clergy of the Diocese of Chichester.