



Dear Friends,

It is perhaps unsurprising that now I am the Prior of Aylesford, pilgrims offer me the assurance of their prayers, which is something I find quite touching and is very much appreciated. Some of them situate this promise within a broader conversation about their memories of Aylesford. I was talking to one such person a few days ago, who remembers Fr Malachy Lynch. She had first visited Aylesford in the 1950s, at the time when the Carmelite friars were rebuilding the priory and Fr Malachy was the charismatic centre of a whirlwind of activity, directing operations and fundraising both at the priory itself and up and down the country. At the time I joined the Order in the early 1990s, a priest of my acquaintance felt prompted to ask me about Fr Malachy, wondering if he were still alive. I explained that he had died in 1972. Apparently, the priest had met Fr Malachy during one of his fundraising tours in the 1950s. I had the distinct impression from him that, once met, Fr Malachy was not easily forgotten. He seemed to have that rare gift of infectious enthusiasm, which gets other people eager about a project. Fr Brocard Sewell often recalled how one would see Fr Malachy bringing all his persuasive powers to bear upon some unsuspecting architect or artist, explaining how marvellous it would be if Aylesford were restored and how it required their skill, time and labour to make it happen. One of the things people often say of Fr Malachy is that he could charm money from the trees. Would that I had such skill myself - rebuilding Aylesford is one thing but maintaining it is quite another! It is a constant worry.

I find it interesting when people reminisce about their experiences of Aylesford, as it is part of the history of this place. There are only four friars here at present but we are conscious that we come at the long line of many others who have lived, prayed, and worked here - dedicated to keeping the vision and mission of Aylesford alive: A place of welcome for all, where people can pray, reflect, and remember all that they hold dear, as well as seek healing or resolution for the challenges that they face in daily life. Memory is tremendously important for us all; being able to recount the past and to offer a perspective on it is how we learn and move forward with our lives. We build on the past - we are shaped by it - but it is important to remember that we should not be constrained by it - that was the mistake made by the Pharisees. One of the great tragedies of the human experience is the loss of a sense of self and meaningful connection with family and friends. I meet many people who care for loved ones with dementia and that slow deterioration is so heartbreaking. Sometimes a place, a piece of music, often just a smell, can be a powerful trigger - a wonderful, if poignant, means of reconnection with memories of happier times, for the person and their friends and family.

Collective memory is integral to any religion and naturally enough Judaism and Christianity root the relationship with God in what can be described as 'salvation history'. Each year the Jewish people celebrates Passover, in which the deliverance of Israel from bondage is recalled in tones which seem almost to suggest that the event was recent history. Each Jewish family, in the domestic liturgy of the season, undertakes that journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, through the symbolism of a meal. The 'maror' (bitter herbs) recall the bitterness of slavery; the 'charoset' (a paste of apples, figs, wine, and nuts) the mortar for the bricks, which the Hebrews made for Pharaoh; the 'matzah' (unleavened bread) the 'bread of affliction'; the four cups of wine are the joyful celebration of a liberated people; and the 'beitzah' (a hard-boiled egg), which represents the festive offering, since the sacrifice of lambs ceased with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE.

The Passover meal laden with meaning and memory, which reinforces Jewish identity and builds community. There is a strong tradition of inclusion, which bids families welcome those who do not have the means to celebrate their own Seder - the poor, the socially isolated, or the stranger. Passover makes most sense when shared with others.

As Christians our religious roots are in the Jewish experience of God and the Old Testament continues to be source of inspiration for us. However, as St Paul reminds his new converts in Galatia, it is by the obedience of faith and not through the observance of the Law of Moses that we are justified (Gal 2:16). Living by faith can often be rather challenging, especially when life is hard or events seemingly unjust. We are tempted to ask why good people suffer, and there is no ready answer. However, we do not exist in isolation; St Paul assures us that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, which cries out 'Abba, Father' (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). As children of God; co-heirs with Christ; and living temples of the Holy Spirit, we are chosen, loved, and precious. What happens to us matters to God - even if things do not change always for the better. Equally, we affirm that we are living stones with our fellow believers and so we need to work together to make this world of ours a better place for everyone.

Lent thrusts us into a desert experience where we reconnect with our values. We are challenged to be converted - to change our minds and hearts. Through prayer, to have a better relationship with God; through almsgiving, a better relationship with our neighbour; and through fasting, a better relationship with our ourselves.



Rhianon and Harry of Akimbo Acrobats



A selection of our dedicated volunteers, who give so much of their time, energy and enthusiasm to *The Friars*

Lent does not strip us entirely for this journey of forty days but we are sustained, as ever, by Word and Sacrament. Our liturgies for Lent present us with a rich tapestry of readings to help us ask ourselves some honest questions, for 'the Word of God is alive and active [...] it can judge secret emotions and thoughts' (Heb 4:12). Like Jesus himself our food should be to do the will of the Father (see Jn 4:34) but we do not find selflessness obedience easy. We receive the Eucharist so that we may become more Christlike - a living sacrifice. At every Mass Jesus tells us to 'do this memory of me'; and so our sacred meal is also an 'Exodus' - we journey from the Cross to the resurrection, and thereby empowered to love and serve the Lord in each other.

News

It was cold and windy during the Christmas Fayre, and it took determination for our staff and volunteers to remain outdoors. Nevertheless, it proved to be a good two days. After expenses we made £24,739.28 which is welcome boost to our funds. On the Sunday we were joined by Tracey Crouch CBE MP and the Mayor and Mayoress of Tonbridge & Malling, Cllr James & Mrs Jill Lark. We had our usual range of stalls and Lennie the Land Train, which ferried children and their parents to Santa's Grotto. However, we always need some special feature to draw members of the public. You may remember that last year we had the Bjorn the animatronic polar bear; this year our we had a life-size snow globe, where Rhiannon and Harry from Akimbo Acrobatics, captivated visitors with their amazing display of strength, poise, and agility. We also had 'walkabout characters' from Walt Disney's *Frozen*.

The following Sunday we hosted the Light Up a Life service arranged each year by the Heart of Kent Hospice chaplain, Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild. This year was a 'first' as we were joined by the Imam of Maidstone, Dr Hafiz Muhammad Usmani. It reminds us that, despite differences of belief we are united in our common humanity and in our faith in the God who revealed himself to Abraham, in supporting those who are affected by grief and loss.

The following Friday we held the popular 'Carols by Candlelight' concert, at which the Medway Towns Brass Band lifted our spirits, as we lifted our voices - trying our best to sing the chorus of 'Ding Dong Merrily on High' in one breath! It was a jolly occasion, which raised £1,377.50.



'Lennie the Land Train' taking excited passengers to see Father Christmas



'Kristoff' (Max), 'Anna' (Phoebe), and 'Elsa' (Julie) from the Disney film *Frozen*



Br Richard Green and Fr Ged Walsh awaiting customers at the ever-popular burger tent.

Mary's Meals

It has been our custom here for a number of years to send our crib offerings to Mary's Meals. The charity, which is based in Argyll & Bute, was founded in 1992 and was know originally as Scottish International Relief. It arose as a response to the plight of children in Malawi. In its early days it fed 200 children, but now the charity heads a worldwide campaign, which is able to feed more than 2.4 million hungry children in 18 of the world's poorest countries – including South Sudan, Ethiopia, Malawi and Yemen. It is shocking to think that in such places it only costs £19.15 to feed two children for a whole academic year: So little can make so much of a difference.

Aylesford's visitors and 'regulars' have demonstrated their own generosity and I can now report that we were able to send them £1,110.00. However, the news is better still. Thanks to the support of a group of generous donors, Mary's Meals is able to run the 'Double The Love appeal', and so our donation will be matched – thereby ensuring that even more hungry children will be fed.

As we approach the great feast of Easter, which is the high point of our liturgical year and the foundation of our lives as people of the resurrection, we could do no better than spend sometime in reflection, considering what kind of impact we have on others. Let us hope and pray that we are always a force for good, bringing light and love into the lives of others through the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, who dwells within us.

Thank you for your continued support of our ministry here at Aylesford. Please be assured of the daily prayers of the Carmelite Community for all our supporters, their families, and friends. May the peace and love of God reign in your hearts.

Michael Cox, O.Carm.

Prior

Congratulations to our Christmas Draw Winners!

1st Prize— £500: A. Joyce—Essex
2nd Prize—£250: Mrs E O'Sullivan—Luton
3rd Prize- £125: M Nunes—London

Many thanks for your support.

Retreats at *The Friars*

GRIEF IN LOSS, HOPE IN CHRIST

Friday 22nd—Sunday 24th March

*Barbara Salamonezyk, Liz Taylor
& Ged Walsh, O.Carm.*

For anyone who has experienced a bereavement, whether recently or some time ago. We grieve, remember, hope and give thanks for our loved ones in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Cost: £230.00 single; £210.00 shared

EASTER TRIDUUM

Thursday 28th —Sunday 31st March

Angela Black & Maggie Cascioli

The retreat will be a prayerful reflection on the passion and resurrection of Jesus through the scriptures and the Liturgy.

Cost: £330.00 single; £300.00 shared.

For more information or to book please call 01622 717272

Easter Lily Dedications

Every year, the chapels at Aylesford will be adorned with lilies throughout the Easter season. Many of our friends like to dedicate one of the lilies for either themselves, a friend, a relative or a loved one who has died. The names of all the lily dedications are recorded and displayed in a book in the Carmelite Saints Chapel.

If you would like to do this, please fill in the name of the person for whom each lily is to be dedicated on the enclosed Intentions Leaflet. The suggested donation for each lily is £5. The lilies will be refreshed regularly and extra monies raised from the dedications will go towards the costs of floral displays for feast days throughout the year.



Summer Draw

The Summer Draw is taking place at our Summer Fayre on Sunday 23rd June. We have enclosed draw tickets with this Spring edition of the Newsletter. Please support The Friars if you are able, and good luck!

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