

Convent 2016

To say that your Calendar today is confusing would be an understatement. Common worship for today signals Ethelburgha, your Calendar is in Thanksgiving for the Dedication of this Chapel, or it also suggests it's a Feria day. What to chose?

Ethelburgha was a powerful woman, born into privilege and power. She was part of a group of powerful women, which included her aunt Hilda, Abbess of Whitby, her sister Sexburgha, Queen of Kent, who founded the Minster Abbey. She also was great friends with St Cuthbert, the young Prior of Lindesfarne, and St Wilfred. In 673 she built a large double monastery at Ely. She had a troubled and traumatic life, often caught in the politics of the land at the time. Even so her life in Christ was lived joyfully, and it attracted many vocations, both men and women to her Abbey, and she gave counsel to the leaders of the time.

This chapel, and your Community, have been for many in our Diocese and beyond a shining light. You stand and live in a great tradition of witness here at Ham. In 60 years of witness here, and overseas, you as a Community have stood out, and been a courageous witness and example to many people, to come closer to Christ, and to live in the joy of the Gospel. Many people from the parishes talk about how their lives have been changed by time spent here, and by the prayerful support and quiet joy, they have experienced from the Community here.

Joy, I believe, is the infallible sign of God's Presence. Although we have no written evidence that Our Lord Jesus Christ laughed, I am personally convinced that he did. How

could He not have shared in our humanity, if he had not had a sense of humour, and shared moments of laughter with His disciples? Laughter is such a precious gift, for it allows us to share circumstances in our lives in a special way. When we allow ourselves to see with joy those often funny events that take place around us, we are able to put ourselves in a proper perspective. Our ability to laugh at ourselves helps reduce our sense of self-importance.

Christ himself used humour, for example, when He depicted a camel struggling to get through the eye of a needle. (Matt. 19:24). And we read in Proverbs 17:22, “that a merry heart does good, like medicine”.

A sense of humour demonstrates to others that we live with joy and gladness in our hearts, because we have reason to be happy. We believe the gift of salvation is a good reason to be happy, since the Lord’s ministry did not end on the Cross, but was followed by His Resurrection, and Ascension. Living with a joyful heart adds value to our faith because it makes others want to share in the joy they see in us.

We can laugh because we know that everything will work out in the end, because God loves us, and we believe His providential hand is at work in our lives. We believe that God knows there is plenty of sadness, sorrow, and sickness in this life, but that it will not prevail, because His plan for our salvation is at work. The old Celtic saying from the time of Ethelburgha, “Life is all about loving, living, and laughing, not about hating, dying, and moaning,” and this has as it’s basis the Christianity of the Celtic people.

The Community here trembles on the edge of a new adventure based in Gerard's Cross. Remember with joy it is the same God who is both calling you and leading you into his future...