

**DEANERY OF ST EDMUND CAMPION
ENGLISH MARTYRS—
VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE PASTORAL AREA**

www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

www.hendredcatholicparish.org.uk

East Hendred Catholic Parish ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

14th – 21st August 2022



***Mary, exalted above the choirs of angels
into eternal triumph with Christ***

ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY and WEEK 20 YEAR 2

14th – 21st August 2022

All masses live-streamed www.churchservices.tv/easthendred
book for Sunday morning Mass: hendred@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk
St Mary's is usually open each day from 9am until late afternoon.

The Solemnity of the Assumption is not only the Principal Feast of our Lady but, in East Hendred Parish, our feast of title, it is also the anniversary of the consecration of the Church in 1865. Though it was defined only in 1950, this belief is ancient and was known in the early Christian centuries. It marks her out as the one who, pre-eminently, shared in the glory of her Son's Resurrection but also is a sign to us that we too shall share in the glory of heaven. This is expressed succinctly in the Second Reading: 'For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.' (1 Cor. 15)

ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY FEAST OF TITLE AND ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION (1865)

14th August	<u>11am</u> 6pm	Solemn Mass Holy Mass	<i>Pro populo</i> <i>Private Intention</i>
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WEEK 20 (Year 2)

Monday 15th August - Thursday 18th August
No Mass

Friday 19th August	<i>Of the Blessed Virgin Mary</i> 8.30am	Holy Mass (<i>Hendred House</i>)	<i>[White]</i>
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Saturday 20th August	St Bernard, Abbot, Doctor of the Church	No Mass	<i>[White]</i>
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SUNDAY 21C 21st August	9.30am 11.15am 6pm	Parish Mass Mass at St Patrick's Holy Mass	<i>[Green]</i> <i>Pro populo</i> <i>Private Intention</i>
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CONTACT DETAILS

Fr Andrew: 01235 835038 or 07976 437979

aburnham@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

office@hendredcatholicparish.org.uk is monitored by the Parish Secretary.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



THE HOLY FATHER'S PRAYER INTENTION FOR AUGUST

We pray for small and medium sized businesses; in the midst of economic and social crisis. May they find ways to continue operating, and serving their communities.

DIOCESAN PRAYER INTENTIONS

Monday 15 th	Polish Chaplaincies in the Diocese
Tuesday 16 th	Our Lady's Catechists
Wednesday 17 th	Parish of St Mary, East Hendred (17.8.1865) and Chapel of Milton Manor House
Thursday 18 th	St Cassian's Centre, Kintbury
Friday 19 th	Worldwide Marriage Encounter
Saturday 20 th	Cathedral Discovery Centre

THE SICK AND THOSE IN NEED

Baby Martha, Sid Wallace, Diana France, John Castle, Daniel Cuevas, John Stringer, Louise Woodhouse, Mary Wallace, Brenda Paddon, Karen Greig, Mary McNichol, Elizabeth Gunn, Des McNichol

THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

Recently departed: Don Woolf-Brears, Petal Connell, Lilian Mary Yates
Week 14th - 20th August: Margaret Brown, Fernley Smith, Elizabeth Hunt, Thomas Dearlove, James Kelly

East Hendred Catholic Parish

NOTICEBOARD

APOLOGIES

Apologies for gaps in the Mass Schedule. Fr Andrew is suffering from sciatica at present and is more or less incapacitated. We hope to get back to normal soon.

CHURCH SERVICES

On Sunday 7th August 2022, 186 people viewed, 57 machines looking only at St Mary's. 31 of these were in the UK, 19 in the USA, 7 elsewhere in the world. 109 probably stayed on-line long enough to take part in Mass.

ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

Today, Sunday 14th August, we celebrate the Assumption of Our Lady, the Feast of Dedication and Title of St Mary's. Masses at 11am and 6pm. No Mass at St Patrick's. There is a Parish Barbecue in the Garden at The Wheatsheaf, East Hendred. The Barbecue is £15 per adult, £20 for families. Free for accompanied children. Unfortunately it is now fully booked. But there will be a second Parish Barbeque, this time at St Patrick's, round about Michaelmas Day (end of September).

CARMELITES ON BOARS HILL

I wonder if we take for granted the precious resource on our doorstep! The Carmelite Friars on Boars Hill <https://www.carmelite.uk.net/> run courses and retreats both on site and on line. Worth keeping an eye on!

ABORTION COERCION

A recent BBC poll found that 15% of British women had experienced pressure or coercion to have an abortion that they did not want. This abuse must be stopped. Please sign SPUC's petition calling on the Health Secretary to urgently commission research into the area of abortion coercion, and in so doing recognise coerced abortion as a priority for health and social policy moving forward, by going to <https://www.spuc.org.uk/coercion>

CLOSER TO CHRIST CAMPAIGN

Following a series of meetings with a cross-section of the Parish, we shall be launching the funding campaign *Closer to Christ* next **Sunday 21st August**. It will be a month long and is tackling the gap in finances in the diocese and parish (including in ours) caused by the COVID pandemic, on the one hand, and the problems of success on the other. Success includes having 10 seminarians (future priests) to train and retired clergy living longer and thus the need for more housing and funding for them.

MISSIONARY COMMUNITIES

The Bishop unveils a ten-year Mission Plan: *You Shall Be My Witnesses*:

<https://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/communications/news/enews/>

This plan will affect everyone in the diocese. The plan was announced to the clergy on 13th July and consultation with everyone will take place in the coming months. Under the plan, between July 2023 and December 2027 parishes will be reorganised and estate rationalised. Our new 'Missionary Community' or 'Parish' will be an amalgamation of Abingdon, Buckland & Faringdon, Didcot & Wallingford; Hendred, Hinksey, Wantage & Lambourn. Teams of clergy will serve each 'Parish'.



Welcome to the latest edition of the ***Closer to Christ*** Campaign Weekly Newsletter.

This week, we were absolutely thrilled to see that over £4 million has now been pledged to the Campaign! We are so grateful for everyone who has given their time, talents and treasure to this initiative so far.

You can read more about the progress made across the diocese and find out which is the latest parish to sign up by clicking [here](#).

Thank you for your generosity.

Closer to Christ Campaign Team

CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

CHILDREN'S CHURCH

Though Children's Church is now closed for the summer holidays we are planning and thinking about the autumn. Have a word with Veronica or Libby if you would like to help.

PARENTS AND TODDLERS' GROUP

It would be great to enable and welcome a Parents' and Toddlers' Group and we now have a first-rate, air-conditioned environment for such a group. The advantage of such groups is that they more or less run themselves. If anyone is interested in such a venture, have a word with Fr Andrew.

YOUNG CATHOLIC ADULT NETWORK

9th –11th September 2022, Durham University. A conference to think about the Catholic calling to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Benedictines, Dominicans, SVP, CAFOD, Aid to the Church in Need, and Catholic Voices. For further information <https://youngcatholicadultnetwork.uk/>

FLAME

Flame, the largest youth gathering of Catholics, is taking place at the OVO Arena, Wembley on Saturday 4th March 2023, with the theme 'Rise Up!' All young people, whether from the parish, at school (Year 9 or older), or at university are welcome. Loud music, bright lights, moments of stillness..... Any questions? Contact youth@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk or phone 07780 221686.

WORLD YOUTH DAY 2023

Those aged 16 or above by July 2023 are invited to join with like-minded young people from across the diocese to journey on pilgrimage to Lisbon for World Youth Day. This is a life-changing experience for all those who accept the invitation and this pilgrimage, led by Bishop Philip, is set to be the best one yet! But hurry, spaces are limited! Plans are in the early stages, but we will provide more information and details as soon as possible. For further information, see the posters in church, or please email wyd@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

mary's
meals

| a simple solution to world hunger

Donate



The Proclaimers, who famously sing about walking 500 miles, are asking you to [Move For Meals](#) this summer to help feed hungry children.

Musical brothers Charlie and Craig Reid are encouraging people to turn their moves into meals by setting themselves an active challenge to raise funds for Mary's Meals. Charlie says: "We're not asking you to walk 500 miles, or 500 more... With Mary's Meals, just a small number of steps can help to feed hungry children across the world."

Craig adds: "It costs just £15.90 to feed a hungry child with Mary's Meals for an entire school year – so a little sponsorship can make a big difference." Whether you choose to walk, run or skip this summer, every move will make an enormous difference to the children who eat Mary's meals.

[Start your Move For Meals fundraising project!](#)



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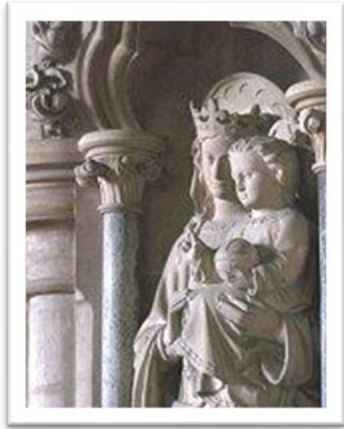
For every £1 you give, 93p is spent directly on our charitable activities. Thank you!

mary's
meals

a simple solution
to world hunger

You can [view this email in your browser](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#) too.

East Hendred Catholic Parish



**The Assumption of
the Blessed Virgin
Mary (ABC)
14th August 2022
Antiphons,
Prayers and Readings**

Entrance Antiphon

Signum magnum

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon beneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. *Cf Rev. 12:1*

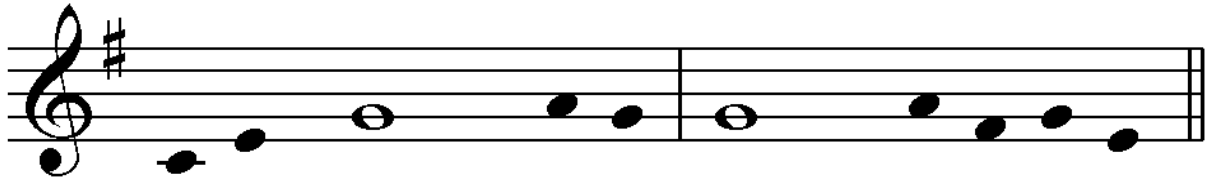
Collect

Almighty ever-living God, who assumed the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of your Son, body and soul into heavenly glory: grant, we pray, that, always attentive to the things that are above, we may merit to be sharers of her glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

First Reading

Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6, 10 (RSV)

A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days..... And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.



R/ On your right stands the queen | in gar-ments of gold.

The daugh-ters of kings are those whom you fa-vour.

On your right stands the queen in gold of O-phir.

Listen, O daughter; pay heed and give ear:

forget your own people and your fa-ther's house. *R/*

So will the king desire your beau-ty.

He is your lord, pay ho-mage to him.

The maiden companions are escorted amid gladness and joy;

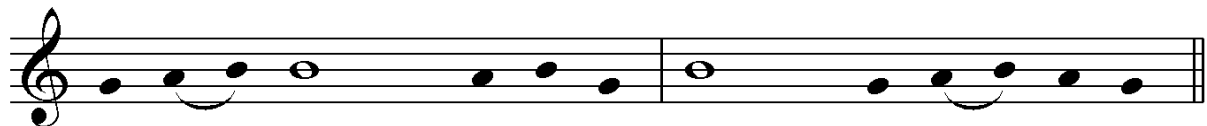
they pass within the pa-lace of the king. *R/*

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 (RSV)

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Gospel Acclamation



Ma - ry has been taken up in-to heav'n:
all the choirs of angels are re - joi - cing.

Gospel

Luke 1:39-56(RSV)

Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechari'ah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”
And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

Prayer over the Offerings

May this oblation, our tribute of homage, rise up to you, O Lord, and, through the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you assumed into heaven, may our hearts, aflame with the fire of love, constantly long for you. Through Christ our Lord.

Preface

De gloria Mariae Assumptae

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For today the Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven, as the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people; rightly you would not allow her to see the

corruption of the tomb, since from her own body she marvellously brought forth your incarnate Son, the Author of all life. And so, in company with the choirs of Angels, we praise you, and with joy we proclaim:

Communion Antiphon

Beatam me dicent

All generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me.

Luke 1:48-49

Prayer after Communion

Having received the Sacrament of salvation, we ask you to grant, O Lord, that, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you assumed into heaven, we may be brought to the glory of the resurrection. Through Christ our Lord.

Salve Regina

Liturgical Hymns 597

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy! Hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

Scripture Reading (Week 20 Year 2)

Monday	Ezekiel 24:15-24	Matthew 19:16-22
Tuesday	Ezekiel 28:1-10	Matthew 19:23-30
Wednesday	Ezekiel 34:1-11	Matthew 20:1-16
Thursday	Ezekiel 36:23-28	Matthew 22:1-14
Friday	Ezekiel 37:1-14	Matthew 22:34-40
Saturday	Ezekiel 43:1-7	Matthew 23:1-12
Sunday 21C	Isaiah 66:18-21	Luke 13:22-30
	Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13	

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Food for the Journey*

15th-19th August 2022 Week 20[ii]

Collect for the Week

O GOD, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see: fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

JOSTLING for our attention this week are another half-a-dozen passages from the Book of Ezekiel, paired with passages from the Gospel according to St Matthew. My selection is based on the view that a mixture is less overwhelming than staying with one, particularly if that one is Ezekiel, whose writings are both colourful and opaque. You will remember that Ezekiel was a Jerusalem priest, part of the elite who in 597BC were taken off to Babylon. He gives us a timeline, which we can just about interpret, and he seems to be prophesying in Babylon about 593BC. He purports to be describing in the present events which had happened before the Exile and, in common with the other prophets of the time, he ascribes the fate of Judah to the sinfulness of the people. God shows his divine power by abandoning the holy city. In the passages from Matthew's Gospel, God is not abandoning the holy city but preparing to enter into it. Like Ezekiel, however, he is speaking about judgment and his presence in Jerusalem will be a time of crisis, a time of judgment.

*

[Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition \(RSVCE\)](#)

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Monday of Week 20

15th August

Reading

Matthew 19:16-22 (RSV)

The Rich Young Man

¹⁶ And behold, one came up to Jesus, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?' ¹⁷ And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' ¹⁸ He said to him, 'Which?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' ²⁰ The young man said to him, 'All these I have observed; what do I still lack?' ²¹ Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

Reflection

WE ARE now on the road to Jerusalem, and a young man encounters Jesus, clearly seeking to understand how to live the devout life. He asks 'What good deed must I do?' This incident is in all three synoptic Gospels (see Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23) but only St Mark tells us that Jesus loves him and only St Matthew tells us that he is a 'young man' as well as, later on, a wealthy one. St Luke calls him a 'ruler' and, in several instances in the New Testament, rulers are seen in opposition to prophets. St Matthew also gives us the challenge to be perfect. We are speaking of perfection as wholeness, a total roundedness – the holiness we hear about in the Book of Leviticus (19:2; 20:26; 21:8). The encounter begins with a reflection on the goodness of God and how we respond by keeping the commandments. To a list of commandments drawn from the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:12-17; Deut 5:16-21), Jesus adds 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev 19:18), which he later (Mt 22:39) adds as a second to the greatest commandment of the Law, love of God. Clearly the young man is spiritually restless and confesses that, even

though he keeps the commandments, he still lacks something. In what feels uncomfortably like a challenge to us all – but was probably speaking to the circumstances of that one person – Jesus tells him to sell all his possessions and follow him. We have remarkable examples in history of people taking that advice themselves – notably St Francis of Assisi – and mendicant friars and itinerant preachers have been principal agents of mission. The celibate clergy too have been traditionally available to travel light and go wherever they are needed for the sake of the Kingdom. For most of us, the challenge is not to literally sell up and travel around but to see money and possessions and family ties with the perspective of Christian discipleship.

Tuesday of Week 20

16th August

Reading

Matthew 19:23-30 (RSV)

The Camel and the Eye of a Needle

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' ²⁵ When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?' ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' ²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?' ²⁸ Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many that are first will be last, and the last first.'

Reflection

TODAY'S Gospel follows on from yesterday's. We heard, the rich young man 'went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions'. This leads to a debate between Jesus and his disciples about the difficulties of riches. The rabbinical illustration of something impossible - an 'elephant' passing through the eye of a needle - is adapted by Jesus to read 'camel'. His disciples would certainly be more likely to see a camel than an elephant. If the rich can't be saved, say the disciples, who on earth can? Here we need to put to the back of our minds for a moment the long tradition of holy poverty in our Christian history and look back through the teaching of the Jewish Law. In the Law (Deut 28:1-14) wealth is a reward for following God's commandments. This was the normal assumption made by pious Jews, despite warnings in, for example, Ezekiel 7:19, that 'their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD'. Proverbs urges moderation: 'Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it' (15:16). By the time of Jesus, the Qumran Essenes were preparing for God's Kingdom by learning to do without money and possessions. Otherwise, as in other settled societies, including the secular West, the poor are those who should be cared for and provided for but it is the rich who are truly fortunate. Rather like the Essenes, in the radical Kingdom Movement that Jesus is inaugurating, values are turned upside down. 'Many that are first will be last, and the last first.' It is not that the rich cannot be saved - after all, Jesus answers the disciples' question, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' What we are talking about is the future Age rather than the present and this is made clear by Jesus telling his apostles that they will be seated on twelve thrones, ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. We should not leave this Gospel passage without reflecting on the relevance of the saying about leaving 'houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands' for Jesus' sake. This relates very closely to the call to be a priest or religious but it also reminds us that the Christian congregation is a family brought together not by biological ties but by belonging to the Lord.

Wednesday of Week 20

17th August

Reading

Matthew 20:1-16 (RSV)

The Labourers in the Vineyard

'The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. ⁵Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' ⁹And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, ¹²saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first last.'

Reflection

THE PARABLE of the Labourers in the Vineyard is, at first sight, grossly unjust. Some seem to have started work early (6am), others at the third hour (9am), others at the sixth and ninth hours (12 noon and 3pm). By the eleventh hour (5pm) the end of the twelve-hour working day was drawing near and yet more workers were hired. The pay seemed to have been uneven and unjust: one denarius for a twelve-hour day, or a nine-

hour day, or a six-hour day, or a three-hour day, or for one hour's work. If we realise that one denarius was the agreed price for manual labour – and what was necessary for a man on a casual contract to look after his family – then it all seems less unjust. In fact an injustice – such as we still see nowadays – is when wages are insufficient to meet basic subsistence. So, in this Kingdom parable, the householder (God), caring for his Vineyard (Israel) recruits and makes use of all who make themselves available – all who stand around in the market place. To each he gives all that they need, though, inevitably, we look on and think that some do better than they deserve. In our indignation, we don't even bother to address our grumbles politely. 'Friend' is how the householder addresses the one who grumbles. We are reminded of two more uses of 'Friend'. One (22:12) is in the Parable of the Wedding Garment and the other (26:50) is Jesus' addressing Judas at the time of the Arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a greeting both relational and stern. We can't miss the opportunity to point out that 'do you begrudge my generosity' in the next to last verse of this parable is a rather loose translation of 'is your eye evil?' The 'evil eye' gained a life of its own in popular superstition but it refers back to Mt 6:23: 'if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness'. The grumblers see only the injustice: they are in the presence of light but see only darkness.

Thursday of Week 20

18th August

Reading

Ezekiel 36:23-28 [Year 2]

A Heart of Flesh

I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my

statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Reflection

THERE are a couple famous passages in the Book of Ezekiel, famous because they are used relatively often in the Church's liturgy. These are today's passage (*A Heart of Flesh*) and tomorrow's (*The Valley of Dry Bones*). *A Heart of Flesh* (Ezek 36) is used as a reading at the Easter Vigil and *The Valley of Dry Bones* (Ezek 37) as a reading at the Vigil of Pentecost.

Today we are looking at the restoration of Israel which is put in context by the verse before it:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

Israel is to be cleansed and restored by God not because she deserves it, but for the sake of God's holiness. He is not a weak tribal deity, who was powerless to prevent the trashing of his Holy Place and the transporting of his people into exile. He is the holy God, Lord of all, and therefore his people must be transformed into a holy people. The reputational damage must be addressed and remedied. And so the principal task is to rid Israel of all idolatry. It was idolatry which got Israel into trouble and they need to be given a new heart, an inner spirit to enable them to walk in God's statutes and observe his ordinances. If it's idolatry that gets you into trouble, it is faithfulness to the Law – to the Covenant – which puts things right. But none of this restoration is down to us: it is God who achieves it, and the new heart in place of the heart of stone is the way he achieves it.

Friday of Week 20 [Year 2]

19th August

Reading

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (RSV)

The Valley of Dry Bones

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. ²And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and behold, they were very dry. ³And he said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.'⁴ Again he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.'

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.

¹¹ Then he said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.'¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD.'

Reflection

The Valley of Dry Bones, read at the Vigil of Pentecost, is plainly about the infusing of the breath of the living Spirit into the dead. Israel, the apostate nation, is dead and its people transported into exile. Its bones are bleached by the desert sun but God brings Israel back to life by re-assembling the skeleton, then clothing the bones with sinews, flesh, and skin. Finally the Spirit is breathed in, giving fresh life. So far, we have the kind of creation text that we find in the ancient Near East. What is new here is that the prophet, speaking the Word of the Lord, at the Lord's command, is the catalyst of change. It is God's miracle but it is brought about by the obedient response of the prophet. The miracle is an immense comfort: the people will know that God is the Lord, when he opens their graves, and raise them from their graves. The in-dwelling Spirit will bring life, and a sure place in the people's own land. That is how they will know that the Lord has spoken, and that he has done it. As we encounter this reading in our own times, we note the sovereignty of God: what he does is what he decides to do and not as a result of any particular response – still less any initiative – on our part. When we see the Church losing ground – as it is in the secular West, despite exponential growth in other parts of the world – we take comfort that all is in God's hands. Like the prophets, we must take the long view.