

Dear all,

Last Sunday

Our thanks to the **Venerable Patrick Curran**, our Archdeacon based in Vienna, for presiding and preaching for us this morning and also for hosting a meeting of the church council on Saturday. Our theme this morning was scripture and was designated as "Bible Sunday". This was half term so it was highly unusual as there was no Sunday school and no youngsters in the congregation save for one babe in arms! Patrick preached about inwardly digesting the scriptures and ended his sermon enigmatically by recounting an encounter between an Austrian journalist and a Monk on Mt. Athos. The journalist asked the Monk "What is your image of God?" and the Monk replied "Today, it is you"

Next Sunday

We say "welcome" to another former Archdeacon - this time from Durham Diocese - the **Venerable Granville Gibson**. An old friend of Romania and the COR, we are pleased to welcome Granville back to preach for us today. This Sunday will be kept as "All Saints Sunday" and we will have the **Sunday school** return and as this will also of course be the first Sunday of the month so we will also host our **Produce sale**. This comes hot on the heels of the last Produce sale which was the most successful one we have ever held. Let's try and better it nonetheless! If you can cook or bake - bring it along!

The Britannia Ball

The date is the **20th February**. The location is the **InterContinental hotel**. Next week we will start the process of planning the event. If you are fairly new and want a better idea of what the ball is - it is a wonderful formal dinner, dancing to live music, a raffle and a live auction. All the proceeds from the evening go to supporting the Anglican Church in Romania and Bulgaria. You can perhaps get an even better idea by seeing the pictures of our first one!! Log on to our website <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> and go to the "picture gallery" and follow the instructions. The first Britannia ball is generally recognised to have been the best of its kind - and this was our first attempt!! Now that we have proved we can do it and do it well, the next one will surely be even better. In the past year our church has gone from the financial doldrums to financial independence, not least due to the success of this event.

Skopje

The young Anglican community met for the first time in the catholic cathedral last Sunday. We continue to pray for John and Ela, and their small community. We pray that they will grow in numbers and in depth. We also include here an **appeal!** Does anyone have a **portable electric organ** that John can use in the side chapel of the Catholic Church?? John and Ela are in Bucharest this weekend so if anyone has one - make yourself known and they can return to Skopje with it! You can be a part of their growth.

Thought for the day

When our Archdeacon was staying with us, he, myself and Alex said morning and evening prayer together. Because we needed three books that said the same thing we used the Book of Common Prayer as our format. Also during the sermon for Bible Sunday brief reference was also made to one of the 39 articles of the Church of England, also in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). These "articles of religion" are not things that are referred to very much in the Church of England nowadays - but when priests are ordained we swear allegiance to them. So they are not just a historical curiosity. I refer to them because I will quote from one of the articles a little later. The subject I am dealing with is very sensitive but two people asked me for my opinion on the subject on Sunday and were quite upset, so because I am not one to brush differences or problems aside I feel I should deal with it here.

The bones of St. Paul are being kept in the Patriarchate at the moment. Thousands upon thousands of people were queuing to file past, pay homage to, or venerate these bones. I know because we passed the huge crowds in Piata Unirii. As I say, some people in church asked me what we should make of the fact, because they were concerned that this is idolatry. But being a charitable sort I said that it might not be *our* tradition but those pilgrims obviously were going to feel truly blessed by the occasion and that God is not going to turn anyone away, or turn his back on anyone if they approach him in faith, love and devotion, even though he is being approached through relics. By way of explanation I also talked about the differing importance given to Saints and icons in our respective traditions. That said, I also think that we cannot just brush aside the strong words of the BCP, a foundational document of the church of England as if they don't exist so I think we at least should be aware of what it says; Article 22 of the 39 articles of the Church of England states;

The Romish doctrine of Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of images as of reliques (Relics), and also invocation of Saints is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God.

So there we have it. Not much wriggle room there. "Repugnant to the word of God" is a very strong statement indeed and made my inclusive and conciliatory response look as weak as water if not downright heresy in the eyes of the Prayer book. So in being open to the use of icons and praying for the protection of Saints and venerating relics (in others at least) am I betraying the 39 articles that I swore allegiance to?

Well we have to remember that the BCP was written in fraught and dangerous religious times, and contexts and times change. Ideas develop and people change. In fact, in these more open and ecumenical times I think it is becoming more and more possible to have our cake and eat it! I think I should state that in my personal beliefs I actually lean very strongly towards article 22 myself, but I can still see that for others, veneration of relics could conceivably bring them into a closer relationship with God. Just because it is not for me, or I can't see what people could possibly get out of it, surely doesn't mean that no-one else can grow through the experience. A spirit of openness to other traditions is at the heart of ecumenism, but openness doesn't mean that we abandon our own unique ways of believing and praying. If we can hold fast to our own beliefs while retaining a humble and generous heart towards the beliefs and practices of others, we would live in a far more peaceful world.

Our **prayer for today** is taken from the BCP and is the second **collect for Peace** from the Morning Prayer service.

*O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord,
in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life,
whose service is perfect freedom;
Defend us, thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies;
that we, surely trusting in thy defence,
may not fear the power of any adversaries,
through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Love and peace

Martin