

PARISH NEWSLETTER

IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

St Arvan's Church is now during the day both for worship and private prayer, Again, we stress there is no obligation while Covid-19 infection rates remain high to attend in person, and that your own safety and health & those of others must remain paramount.

There is now no legal obligation to wear masks in church, but please do so if you wish. If you feel unwell with Covid-like symptoms, or have tested positive, please take part in our church services online rather than attend in person.

Our live-streamed services will continue as follows: Sunday Eucharist at 10. a.m., and a reflection & celebration of Night Prayer on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. are live-streamed on the St Arvans Parish Group page on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/vicaragecello1/> and are available to watch at any time All our Holy Weeek and Easter services will be live-streamed.

Please help to keep us informed of anyone who is in need or is isolated over the next weeks and months, and anyone in need of our prayer and support
Parish Priest (Vicar / Rector):
Fr Michael Gollop,
The Vicarage, St Arvans
01291 622064;
Mobile 07867803479

24th April 2022 The Second Sunday of Easter

The Collect

Almighty Father, you have given your only Son to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification: grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **AMEN**

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

When the temple police had brought the apostles, they made them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.' [5; 27 - 32]

*Reader/ This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God*

Psalm 118 14 - 29

R/ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.
Joyful shouts of salvation sound from the tents of the righteous:
'The right hand of the Lord does mighty deeds; the right hand of the Lord raises up; the right hand of the Lord does mighty deeds.'

R/ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has punished me sorely, but he has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter and give thanks to the Lord.

R/ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

R/ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
Come, O Lord, and save us we pray. Come, Lord, send us now prosperity.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; we bless you from the house of the Lord.

R/ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

The Lord is God; he has given us light; link the pilgrims with cords right to the horns of the altar.
You are my God and I will thank you; you are my God and I will exalt you.
O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures for ever.

R/ This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

A reading from the Revelation to St John [1; 4 - 8]

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

*Reader/ This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God*

Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!

Jesus said: ‘

You believe because you can see me.

Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet believe.’

Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:

And also with you

**Listen to the Gospel of Christ
according to St. John.** [20, 19 - 31]

R/ Glory to you, O Lord.

It was evening on the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of the Lord
R/ Praise to you, O Christ.

A Prayer of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are
in the Blessed Sacrament.

I love you above all things,
and I long for you in my soul.

Since I cannot now receive you
sacramentally, come at least
spiritually into my heart.

As though you have already come,
I embrace you and unite myself entirely to
you; never permit me

to be separated from you. Amen.

(The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament)

For Your Prayers

That we may rejoice in the glorious
resurrection of Christ our Lord

The people of Ukraine.

The peace of the world

The people of France as they vote in their
presidential election

Those killed and injured in Ukraine

Those without adequate food and shelter

For all migrants, refugees, and all forced
to flee from their homelands

Those who care for the environment
and the natural world

Those here and throughout the world who
continue to suffer from the Coronavirus
pandemic - for doctors, nurses and all
medical staff, all carers, medical scientists
and researchers.

For those in government throughout the
world, that they may make informed, wise
and compassionate decisions

For the Church:

For the bishops of the Church:
Cherry, Bishop of Monmouth, Philip,
Episcopal Visitor of the Society of the Holy
Cross in Wales, Justin, Archbishop of
Canterbury. & for all who hold and teach
the Catholic faith that comes to us from
the Apostles.

All bishops, priests and deacons and all
baptised Christians

For the reunion of all Christians: for Pope
Francis, for Orthodox Patriarch
Bartholomew, & for the leaders of the
Reformed traditions

For the Sick & those in need:

Roy Staples, Ralph Hamilton, Patricia
Hamilton; Sylvia; The Revd Helen
Rodwell; Kim; Elisabeth; Marion Webster;
Lorna; Michael; Judith; Lisa; Carole Bates;
John Metivier, priest; David Nicholson,
priest.

For the Departed:

The recently departed; for Robert Bowyer;
our own departed relatives & friends,
& those whose anniversaries of death
fall at this time.

The Jereboam Interview

*We continue our series of extracts from
the Jerusalem and Galilee Gazette, an
imaginary first-century newspaper. Week
by week the correspondent Jereboam
interviews various people whose lives
have been affected in some way by Jesus
Christ and his teaching.*

*Thanks to the Parish of St Catharine’s
Chipping Campden & to the author for
permission to reproduce ‘Jereboam’*

Isaac

Jereboam: This week I’d like to
introduce Isaac, a member of the Church
who has a particular family link to Jesus.
Isn’t that right, Isaac?

Isaac: Yes: my son Thomas
was one of Jesus’ close band of followers
– the so-called “apostles”.

Jereboam: Forgive my insensitivity,
but, as I understand it, Thomas rather
tarnished his reputation. Didn’t he express
doubts about Jesus’ resurrection?

Isaac: Well yes, he did. Don’t
worry: you’re not being insensitive. It’s an
obvious issue to raise. Personally I think
it’s a shame that Thomas’ reputation has
suffered because of his doubts. To me
they show a side of his character that’s
rather appealing.

Jereboam: Really?

Isaac: Yes. He’s always
observed everything very keenly. Even as
a youngster he would point to...to a leaf,
for example, and he’d say: “Look at the
wonderful shape of that leaf. Isn’t that
beautiful?” His acute powers of
observation were always fundamental to
his appreciation of God’s creation. I
reckon that this awareness might have led
to Jesus choosing him as an apostle in the
first place.

Jereboam: It certainly seems an admirable quality.

Isaac: But you can imagine that someone who observes things so closely might not easily accept something that he hasn't witnessed himself.

Jereboam: That makes sense, yes.

Isaac: Anyway, look at it like this. If someone like Thomas eventually did accept that Jesus had risen from the dead, doesn't that make it all the more credible? As Jeremiah said – Jeremiah is Thomas' twin brother, by the way: "If it's good enough for Thomas, then it's good enough for me."

Jereboam: Although Jesus is recorded as having said: "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Isaac: Certainly, yes, and that's clearly a topical issue at the moment. No-one has seen Jesus since his Ascension, and it must be hard for people simply to take our word for what's happened. Think of it this way, though: if you can accept that Jesus might have been the Son of God, it's a much smaller step to believe that he might have given his Church the authority to speak about it.

Jereboam: I'd need to think about that...

Thought for the Week

"The Paschal Mystery is above all the mystery of life in which the Church, by celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ, enters into the Kingdom of Life which He has established once for all by His definitive victory over sin and death.

Thomas Merton
'Seasons of Celebration'

This Week

On the Second Sunday of Easter, we get a picture of how the early community gathered around as "Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles." St John's Gospel gives us two post-resurrection stories that feature Thomas, the doubting apostle. "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have

believed."

On Monday we celebrate the Feast of St. Mark, Evangelist, with its own special readings. Friday is the feast day of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church.

The Acts of the Apostles throughout this week offers us the challenges the apostles faced from the earliest communities and from the Jewish authorities.

For the remaining five weeks of the Easter season, the first readings will be from the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels from St John', with stories of Jesus' ministry not heard during the rest of the year.

The weekday readings begin with the frightened Pharisee, Nicodemus, coming at night to speak to Jesus, asking how anyone can be "born again." Jesus says we must be born of water and Spirit. John's gospel offers a poetic look at light and darkness, good and evil: "the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light..." But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God. John writes, "For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God." After Jesus' disciples tell him to send 5,000 people away, he shows them how to feed them all. He walks across the sea to meet his apostles in their boat, saying, "It is I. Do not be afraid."

Next Sunday: After the events of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Sunday, Peter longs to return to his old life. "I am going fishing," he says. In a scene reminiscent of the original call of Peter, Jesus appears to the group after a futile night of fishing but is unrecognized by his followers. He calls out to Peter in the boat and tells him where to drop his fishing nets. The fish overflow the nets and they suddenly recognize him: "It is the Lord!" Jesus cooks them breakfast and asks Peter three times if he loves him. Peter, puzzled, affirms three times that he loves Jesus - just as he denied him three times during the Passion. "Feed my sheep," Jesus says to him.

A Homily for The Second Sunday of Easter

+ Today is the end of the Easter Octave, but not, of course, of the Easter Season,

which will run for another six weeks. Just like on Easter Sunday itself, today's Gospel is dominated by an atmosphere of uncertainty. And, as you might expect, we are not given a simplistic or glib answer to the complex human struggle with faith and doubt. To repeat last Sunday's question, *what do we make of the Resurrection?*

St John tells us that in the evening of the day of the Resurrection - the same day the apostles and disciples had heard that the Lord had risen and had seen the empty tomb, the first Easter Day in other words, Jesus himself appeared to them and conferred upon them the authority to forgive sins in his name. Thomas, the Twin, hadn't been with them and when he heard what had happened he was deeply sceptical and refused to believe what the others were telling him. He will only believe, he tells them in return, if he can reach out and touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side, the wounds presumably he himself had seen inflicted. He knew Jesus was dead and not having been with the others, he wasn't going to be so easily convinced that he was now alive.

So a week later – today in real time - John says Jesus appeared to his followers again, and this time Thomas was with them and was changed by this encounter from a total sceptic into one of the foremost witnesses of both Jesus' resurrection and his divinity. As with all the Apostles with the exception of John himself, who tradition says died a natural death, this encounter with the Risen Christ led to Thomas travelling through Syria and Persia preaching the Resurrection until he died as a martyr in South India, where the Church which bears his name still survives. You don't do that unless you are utterly convinced of something. This was an earth-shattering, life-changing meeting. But Thomas was an honest man; he wasn't going to pretend to accept something he wasn't sure about. Those of us whose minds are naturally somewhat sceptical and cautious can draw a great deal of comfort from his example. He just wasn't that easily convinced, and he wasn't around when the Risen Jesus first appeared.

And despite the element of reproach in Jesus' words to him when he did appear, *'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,'* it's also clear that Jesus in some way

respects Thomas' basic intellectual honesty, because he willingly submits to Thomas' demand for evidence and allows him to touch the wounds of his crucifixion: *'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'*

It's a subtext, but it's also clear that the Lord realises that those sceptical words of Thomas have a hidden yet profound significance in that Thomas has somehow subconsciously grasped the truth that Jesus can now be recognised by his wounds, the tangible proof of his suffering, the visible signs of his love for us.

And in turn Thomas's reaction to the clearly crucified yet risen Christ is to come out with what is perhaps the most ringing declaration of faith in the entire New Testament: *"My Lord and my God!"* The Risen Christ has taken away from him all doubt and all uncertainty.

Those words of implicit rebuke are still there: *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,"* yet they are meant as much for us (who cannot physically reach out and touch the Risen Lord) as for Thomas himself. This encounter, this apostolic experience of the Resurrection, is important for us in several respects. Firstly, it reassures us that the Lord understands our insecurities and our doubts and our demands for conclusive evidence, but, secondly, it also shows us that doubt itself can lead us, with God's grace, to an outcome which is far more than an indefinite wallowing in uncertainty; and thirdly, that the words addressed to St Thomas by the Risen Christ remind us forcibly of the true meaning of a mature and hard won faith, and encourage us to persevere in trying to acquire it through all the difficulties and doubts and uncertainties which are thrown up in the process of living (or trying to live) the Christian life,

So, yes, *'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,'* but not as a cop-out, not as an evasion of human reality in the lives we actually live in what is a pretty hostile and unbelieving culture. We need to follow Thomas in trying to see the power of the resurrection in our own lives, not to forsake honesty but to allow the risen Lord himself to reach out to us and draw us into the life of his resurrection. He offers us life without limit or end if we have the courage to accept his invitation. We are called to recognise

him and the new life he offers us, even in the midst in our own woundedness and vulnerability, even through our doubts and hesitations and our slowness to believe – maybe even because of those things. Because it is by *his* wounds that we reach out and touch in worship, prayer and devotion, that our own wounds are healed.

Services in the Group for the Second Sunday of Easter

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans
Hymns (New English Hymnal) 105; 107;
124; 112

11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist at Itton

Our thanks to all those who decorated our churches so beautifully for Easter.

A Prayer for Ukraine

written by Ukrainain Christians

O Lord our God, look down with mercy on the Ukrainian people. Protect and save them from the unjust aggressors who seek to subdue them. Grant them steadfast trust in your mercy and protection.

O Mother of God, who gave us your miraculous icon at Zarvanytsia, intercede for the Ukrainian people, who run to the shelter of your mercy in their times of need.

O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Grant peace and protection to the people of Ukraine. Give them strength and courage to defend what is good, right, and holy. Keep them safe from harm and provide for all their needs, both temporal and spiritual.

Hear our prayers, O Lord, and deliver us from distress, for You are merciful and compassionate and love mankind. To you we give glory: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Upcycling Warehouse in Chepstow (*opposite Chepstow Railway Station*) **is collecting refugee relief goods for Ukraine.**

Ministry Area Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to work together as a Ministry Area.

May we engage with each other with faith and encouragement.

May we manage each situation with wisdom and mutual respect.

May we serve with integrity, creativity and purpose.

May we speak with openness and gentleness.

May we offer our gifts, time and finances with generosity.

May we face each challenge with courage and the desire to grow through it.

May we all be drawn deeper into our relationship with you and be known as your disciples.

Help us to show your love, proclaim your Good News and grow your Kingdom in this place.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. **AMEN**

SEVERN WYE MINISTRY AREA

PRAYING TOGETHER

"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results."

JAMES 5:16

Praying Together for our Ministry Area and our local communities

**THE 2nd AND 4th MONDAY
OF EVERY MONTH
7.30 TO 8.30 PM
St Christopher's Church,
Bulwark, Chepstow**