

PARISH NEWSLETTER

IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

St Arvan's Church is open 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

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;
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3rd July 2022
St Thomas, Apostle

The Collect

Almighty and eternal God, who, for the firmer foundation of our faith, allowed your holy apostle Thomas to doubt the resurrection of your Son till word and sight convinced him: grant to us, who have not seen, that we also may believe and so confess Christ as our Lord and our God;
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 prophet Habakkuk

I will stand at my watch-post,
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Then the LORD answered me and said:
Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

[2. 1-4]

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

Psalm 31 1 - 6

R/ The Lord has done great things indeed

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.
Incline your ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.

R/ The Lord has done great things indeed

Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold;
guide me, and lead me
for your name's sake.
Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me,
for you are my strength.

R/ The Lord has done great things indeed

Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me,
O Lord God of truth.
I hate those who cling to worthless idols;
I put my trust in the Lord.

R/ The Lord has done great things indeed

A reading from letter of St Paul to the Ephesians [2. 19-22]

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

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

[Gradual Hymn]

Alleluia, alleluia!
You believe, Thomas,
because you have seen me,
says the Lord.
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 **Glory to you, O Lord.**

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.'
[St John 20.24–29]

This is the Gospel of the Lord
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 come to an authentic faith which believes and proclaims the Lord's Resurrection
The well-being of the earth and everything which lives on it.
The people of Ukraine.
The peace of the world
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 here and throughout the world who continue to suffer from the Coronavirus pandemic - for doctors, nurses, all medical staff, carers, medical 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; Lisa; Anne-Louise; Abigail; John Metivier, priest; David Nicholson, priest.

For the Departed:

The recently departed; John Henry Lewis Rowlands, priest; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Tony Hall; Nicola Olant; Alan Price; Philip Price; Brian Papps

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.

Our thanks to the Parish of St Catharine's Chipping Campden & to the author for permission to reproduce 'Jereboam'

Sara

Jereboam: Good morning. I'm hoping to speak to followers of Jesus.

Sara: Well, you've come to the right place. We have three of his young friends staying with us here at the moment. I think you'll find several more at the next house over there.

Jereboam: This is all very well organised, I must say. Jesus must have a whole network of contacts to set up accommodation for all these people.

Sara: No – it wasn't like that at all. They just arrived in the town and asked around, to see if anyone could put them up for a night or two.

Jereboam: So you had no prior knowledge of this...It's certainly very kind of you to welcome these people.

Sara: Think of it like this: if you've got something to offer, it's really satisfying to be able to make that contribution. You're realising your potential. And anyway, they're all lovely guests – at least I've heard nothing but glowing reports from everyone around here.

Jereboam: Look, this is going to seem really rude, but you've just reminded me of a friend of mine. He reckons that people perform acts of charity to make themselves feel good.

Sara: Well, I don't mean to sound precious, but in a sense this house belongs to God, just as everything else does. By sharing it with these good people, we're just letting go of the mistaken idea that the place was ever exclusively ours in the first place. It's a bit like irrigation really. But what am I doing, holding you up? Boys, there's someone here to see you.

Follower of Jesus: Oh thanks, Sara. We'll be right there.

Jereboam: Come on, you can't leave it like that. What's all this about irrigation?

Sara: Well, the point of irrigation is to channel water from places where it accumulates to other areas where it's needed. That seems like a good idea to me – but it doesn't half make it complicated if you start worrying about who owns the water...Here we are, lads. This gentleman would like to speak with you.

Follower of Jesus: Thanks, Sara.

Thought for the Week

"Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand."

St. Augustine

This Week

Today we celebrate the Feast of Saint Thomas, the apostle. The Gospel repeats a familiar story from the Easter Season, of the sceptical Thomas who becomes a believer in the Resurrection after a transforming encounter with the Risen Lord

The first readings this week are from the prophet Hosea. Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom. He was powerful and tender in expressing God's relationship to Israel in terms he knew. His wife was unfaithful to him in the way Israel was unfaithful to God - yet he still loved his wife as God was still faithful to Israel. On Saturday, we begin reading from the

prophet Isaiah, beginning with the call of Isaiah.

This week St Matthew's Gospel shows us how Jesus calls his Apostles and how he sent them out on mission. We begin with Matthew's version of Jesus healing an official's daughter, and along the way he heals the woman suffering haemorrhages. Jesus heals a mute man, but the Pharisees accuse him of using evil powers to do this. Jesus continues to heal. He tells his disciples to pray for even more disciples. Jesus selects twelve special disciples, his Apostles (meaning "those who are sent"), and gives them the power to heal and to proclaim, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." They are sent to "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons." And they are not to charge for their ministry. They are to be discerning: "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves." He tells them that they will be persecuted, "but whoever endures to the end will be saved." Jesus tells them to not be afraid, for God will protect them.

Next Sunday is the Fourth Sunday after Trinity. In St Luke's gospel we see Jesus challenged by a scholar who asks how to obtain eternal life. Jesus says "love your neighbor as yourself." When he is asked, "who is my neighbour?" Jesus tells the well-known story of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to help a Levite who had been left for dead. Even though others had passed by the Levite, the Samaritan cares for him with tenderness. "Go and do likewise," Jesus tells us.

A Homily for the Feast of St Thomas the Apostle

+ We don't get to celebrate the Feast of St Thomas on a Sunday that often, and like quite a few of the apostles – the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus as witnesses to his Resurrection and to lead the Church after his Ascension – we don't know that much about his life.

What the Church's tradition says is that after the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Thomas took the new faith and preached the Resurrection first to nearby Syria and then on through Persia (modern day Iran), until he died a martyr's death as far away as Kerala in South India, where there are still several Christian traditions

which trace their origins to his witness of faith.

Most of us, though, if we know anything at all about Thomas, will think of him as the origin of that rather unfair phrase "doubting Thomas" – because of the story related by St John in the Gospel this morning.

John's Gospel 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, Jesus himself appeared to them. 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, 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, 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. From what we said about his later life, Thomas' encounter with the Risen Christ was an earth-shattering, life-changing event. Thomas, it seems, was an honest man; he wasn't going to pretend to accept something he wasn't sure about. Those of us whose minds tend to be somewhat sceptical and cautious can draw a great deal of reassurance from his example. He just wasn't that easily convinced by the experience of others without also seeing for himself.

And it's also clear that Jesus respects Thomas' basic intellectual honesty, because he does submit to Thomas' demand for evidence and personal experience, 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.'* And in turn Thomas's reaction to the clearly crucified yet also clearly alive Jesus is to come out with 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 the Risen

Lord, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,*" are meant much more for us who can't physically reach out and touch the Risen Lord, as for Thomas himself.

This encounter, this 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 positive than an indefinite hesitation and uncertainty; and thirdly, that the words addressed to St Thomas by the Risen Jesus remind us powerfully of what it means to have a mature and hard won faith, and they encourage us to persevere through all the questions, difficulties and doubts and uncertainties which are inevitably thrown up in the process of living (or trying to live) the Christian life. So, yes, those words: '*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,*' hold true, but they're not meant as a reason for not wanting our own experience of the reality of Christ's love, or, for that matter, for suspending our God-given intelligence. We're meant to have faith and trust, not naïve credulity. We're not asked to believe everything we're told without first examining it and its reality for us in terms of our own inner experience. What Jesus says to Thomas isn't intended as a way of stopping us from asking necessary questions and struggling with difficult issues, because it's through our questioning, our doubts and our uncertainties that, like St Thomas himself, we can be brought face to face with the reality of the Risen Christ in our own lives, and to allow the risen Lord himself to reach out to us and draw us into the life of his resurrection. We have to allow Christ himself – through prayer, through the grace of the Sacraments, through our encounters with others, to change our perspective. The Anglo-American writer Denise Levertov puts these words into the mouth of Thomas the apostle in her poem, *St Thomas Didymus (St Thomas the twin)*:

*"What I felt was not scalding pain,
shame for my obstinate need,
But light, light streaming into me,
over me, filling the room
As if I had lived til then*

*in a cold cave, and now
Coming forth for the first time,
the knot that bound me unravelling,
I witnessed all things
quicken to colour, to form,
My question not answered
but given its part
In a vast unfolding design
lit by a risen sun."*

We can recognise him and the new life he offers, us even in the midst of our own human frailty, in our own woundedness and vulnerability, *through* our sometimes *unresolved* doubts and hesitations, if we remain open to the possibility of grace. We get there through our humanity and our woundedness, precisely because it is by his human wounds that our wounds can be healed, and that through his resurrection that we can be brought to our own. +

Services in the Group: St Thomas, Apostle

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans
(Live streamed)
Hymns *(New English Hymnal)*
215; 341; 216; 339
11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist with hymns
at St Mary, Penterry
4 p.m. Family Service at St James,
Devauden

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**

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.**

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**