



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 22nd October 2023
The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

Email: bockingchurch@gmail.com Call: (01376) 324887 www.stmarys-bocking.com
or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 22nd October

8am Said Mass
10am Sung Mass

297

372

Wednesday 25th October

9.30am Said Mass

H

Sunday 29th October

8am Said Mass
10am Sung Mass

427

Panfield Church

Sunday 22nd October

11am Holy Communion

Tuesday 24th October

5pm Evening Prayer/Office Hour

Sunday 29th October

11am Holy Communion (BCP)

Gospel Acclamation

*Your word is truth, O Lord,
consecrate us in the truth*

NOTICES

Funerals - At St Mary's we were very saddened to hear of the death of Peter Smith, a bellringer here for many years, his funeral will be **Friday 27th October 1.30pm in church**. In Panfield, we wanted to let you know that Chris Halls' funeral will be **Weds 25th October at 11am in Panfield Church**. Furthermore, Fred Bowler's funeral will be on **Wednesday 1st Nov, 12.30pm** at Three Counties.

Stepping Stones - This final session will be **Monday Oct 23rd** from **6.30 to 7.30pm** in the church. Further sessions will follow in 2024. If you have ideas for themes/topics to be discussed please let Fr Rod.

Confirmation - **Monday 30th October at 7.30pm** we will be welcoming Bishop Roger for a service of Confirmation. We have 7 slightly nervous candidates for the service and all from this Benefice. It would be good if you could come along and support them. It will be a great occasion, so don't miss it.

Friendly Friday Cafe - is now underway and will run each Friday until December 15th. Sessions start at 12noon and run until 3pm in the Hall. All are very welcome, why not pop down and bring a friend too.

Thank you - What a busy Sunday last weekend! Thank you to those who came on the Wildlife Walk it was the perfect day for it, with lots of newcomers joining us too which is positive. We are also pleased to say that the Bring and Buy sale raised nearly £200 profit which is great news.

Quarterly Newsletter - The Autumn Issue is here and it would be fantastic to get copies out across the Parish. If you are able to deliver to your road or other local roads please take enough to do so and sign the sheet at the back so that we know what road/roads are covered. Thank you.

OCC Shoebox Appeal - Can you support the shoebox appeal this year? Here are just some of the items you might be able to gift.... Hats, mittens, wrist warmers, headbands, scarves (small), bags, knitted glove puppets. For stationery, you could donate pens, pencils, notebooks, rulers, rubbers, crayons etc. For toiletries, we are looking for soap bars, sponges, flannels, toothbrushes, combs, hairbrushes, possibly hairbands, scrunchies, bracelets. Finally you could donate a small toy, but it must have a CE mark. All items need to be in by the end of October, thank you. *Pamela Gibson*

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Darren Hodges, Gemma Howe, Julie Wilkinson, Barry and Janice Goody, Ron Cole, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, Tony & Ann and Margaret Everitt. We remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Violet Mears, Elsie Goodchild, Mabel Long, Albert Tagg, Ronald Brooks, Joseph Murray, Bob Pickford, and Leopold Hacault (Priest).

The Collect for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

God, the giver of life,
whose Holy Spirit wells up within your Church:
by the Spirit's gifts equip us to live the gospel of Christ
and make us eager to do your will,
that we may share with the whole creation
the joys of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Epistle Reading - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Address

It was a trick question. If Jesus said 'no, you shouldn't pay tax' then he risked being seen as taking a stand against the Roman occupation with possible dire consequences for himself and his followers. If, however, he said you should pay, then was he perhaps collaborating with that regime and not being true to his calling. There was no right answer. But by asking for a coin and throwing the question back at those who posed it, he left them speechless. The coin in question was a denarius, a silver coin no bigger than an old sixpence but depicting the Roman Emperor's head, name and title. It must have been in common use. Does the fact that Jesus asked to be shown the coin suggest that he, and his followers, may not have carried money? And if the Pharisees were carrying Roman money even though as good Jews they were not supposed to have images of people on their coins, then the charge of hypocrisy had some force.

While Jesus's answer may have left them amazed, it is not particularly helpful if we are trying to think about the relationship between church and state in our own day. We can in a sense dodge the question by saying, quite correctly, that all things come from God. Indeed one of the congregational responses at the Offertory is to say, 'All things come from you, and of your own do we give you'. Everything in heaven and on earth might indeed be God's, but that still leaves plenty of room for discussion about how best in practical terms to make use of this bounty. For many centuries, at least in our own country and in Europe more generally, the churches played a leading role in caring for people in need and providing the sort of health and social services that are now usually the responsibility of the state. All of this has, of course, to be paid for, and that generally means through taxation, even if charitable donations also have an important part to play.

As many of you may know, I spent most of my career before going into full-time ministry working in the Civil Service. Much of that time was spent in what was then H M Customs and Excise, now Revenue and Customs. Few people like paying tax and the visiting VAT inspector was never going to be especially popular. But my general impression was that the tax man (or woman) usually tried to be fair and to be as helpful as possible. On the other hand it was necessary to ensure that the taxes approved by Parliament were collected. In a complex tax regime mistakes might be excusable; but deliberate evasion, especially when practiced by well-known large organisations, could not be tolerated. While it was not necessarily the most enjoyable of jobs, I had no difficulty in feeling that what I was doing was compatible with my Christian faith. Indeed my ordination as Deacon happened at same time as I was involved in some quite complicated changes to VAT on building work.

I was also aware throughout my time as a Civil Servant that a not insignificant number of civil servants were practising Christians. This included people in very senior posts. There was, and is, no necessary contradiction between being involved in public and political life and having a strong faith. That is also true of people from other faith communities. It may be debatable whether it is still right to call Britain a Christian country given the growing number of people who say that they are of no religion or who practise a different faith. It is, however, still true that the sort of values that are derived from being a committed member of a faith group remain important in public life.

I realise that some people may feel that politics should be kept out of what happens in church. One response to that comes in the words of the great South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "When people say that religion and politics don't mix, I wonder which Bible it is they are reading." Politics, in the sense of engaging with the practicalities of living in an increasingly complex world and seeking to find the best outcomes to some very difficult issues, cannot be wholly divorced from the values that we proclaim as Christians. Of course that does not mean that we favour one particular political party.

It does mean, however, that church ought to be one of the places where the values that underpin our national life can be expressed and explored. I have been aware in previous parishes that the churches have often taken the lead in providing a venue for each political party to set out its policies, particularly at election time; and in providing a space for controversial issues such as the UK's membership (or otherwise) of the European Union to be explored. This is not to take sides but to ensure that competing voices can be heard.

Much of what happens in public life is neither particularly exciting nor particularly glamorous. I have on a very few occasions taken my place in the Officials Box behind the Speaker's Chair in the House of Commons. I have been to a party in Downing Street – though at No. 11 not No. 10 and certainly not in the time of lockdown. But these are not what public service is about. Rather it is about trying to do one's best within the context you are working in. This might be a specific locality: it is important to acknowledge the work local councillors do, for no reward and often being greatly undervalued. Our community life would be very much poorer without their commitment. Equally it is important to give proper worth to those who serve their local communities in less formal ways. Also, while it is easy to accuse politicians of simply being in it for their own gain, it is much better to recognise that being involved in national political life can require a degree of commitment that has a significant impact on personal and family life. Some people may enter politics for personal gain; most do it to serve others.

One outstanding feature of St Mary's is that, as well as being a church rooted in a very specific theological tradition, it is also essentially at the heart of its community. Religion and politics may sometimes not mix very well, but a church that seeks to serve its whole parish, and not just those who relate to its particular tradition, has to be aware of what is going on in the local community. That inevitably means some engagement with local politics and local government. The church may be able to take on the role of 'critical friend' but it can only do that with credibility if it is prepared to take local politics seriously. Perhaps it would be good occasionally to acknowledge in our worship the role of local councillors in building up community.

This sermon has perhaps strayed some way from the 'render unto Caesar', 'render unto God' words of the Gospel. Maybe, in the world we live in, that is inevitable. Twenty-first century life is complicated. But surely we can honour those who devote themselves to doing the best for their local community whether through Church or through political engagement. There is no need for competitiveness here, but rather co-operation. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father,
whose Son, the light unfailing,
has come from heaven to deliver the world
from the darkness of ignorance:
let these holy mysteries open the eyes of our understanding
that we may know the way of life,
and walk in it without stumbling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.