

January 2011

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

I must begin by thanking Father Trent Fraser, SSC, a long-time member of the Council, and his people at St John's Church, Newport, Rhode Island, for their gracious and sumptuous welcome to the Guild's Council and visiting members on the occasion of the Annual Mass and Meeting this November. St John's is, of course, an exceedingly beautiful church, and its setting, in Newport's colonial Point district, is uniquely attractive. A beautiful, gold autumn day greeted us and one which was, in fact, far much warmer than would normally be the case. (Our last visit to Newport, in 2001, took place in sleet!) Jonathan Babbitt, St John's Organist and Choir Master, provided Fauré's *Requiem* with a chamber orchestra and augmented voices. A group of parishioners provided a very delicious luncheon following (including the best homemade lasagne I have ever had), and as they say, a good time was had by all. Father Robert Farmer, a member of the English Guild's Council, had been engaged to come to preach to us for quite a long time, but as it turned out, on the day of our Council meeting, he was elected President of the English Guild, replacing The Bishop of Richborough, who has resigned both his see and as an officer of the Guild in order to make his individual submission to the Holy See. Father Farmer's excellent sermon is reprinted elsewhere in this number of the *Intercession Paper*. Nine of the twelve members of the Council were with us, including Father Ralph Walker, Warden of the Guild, who, though beset by various and serious health challenges, came heroically anyway! We were much the richer for his presence, as always. I would like to bear witness here and now to Father Walker's commitment to the Guild. He has come very nearly every year for longer than I can remember, and he is quite often the one who has come the furthest in order to be present. The fact that his parish and the Guild share the patronage of St Michael is not, I believe, an accident, and his support for me as Superior, in his role as Warden, has often been of great help. I have tried in my own small way to do the same for him since he has been Master of the Society of the Holy Cross. (I hope you will all join in our prayers for Father Walker's speedy and full recovery. Though we naturally and rightly have recourse to man's cunning, in the form of medicine, it is the hand of God that heals.)

As I mentioned, we were very pleased to learn that Father Farmer has taken over the leadership of the English Guild. As he has been with us for our Council Meeting and Annual Mass, and as he and I have visited each other's churches, it makes for a particularly strong and meaningful bond. He is the latest in the series of English Guild Presidents (they are so styled) who have visited American Guild functions: Bishop Keith Newton in 2006, Bishop Edwin Barnes, Bishop John Klyberg twice, and of course Father Peter Laister, who was President of the English Guild whilst Vicar of Holy Redeemer, Clerkenwell, in London, and then a member of the Council of the American Guild from 1986 to 1993, whilst he was my predecessor at S. Clement's, Philadelphia. We look forward to a long and warm association with Farmer Farmer during his tenure.

Before I forget, we have been asked a few times about the photographs used in the *Intercession Paper*. We have been using the various churches of Council Members or places where the Guild is well established. We have now worked our way through most of the Council members' churches, and this number has a nice photograph of the High Altar of my church, the Guild's National Shrine, vested as for a Requiem. On the back cover, we find St James' Church, Texarkana, Texas, where Father Douglas Anderson, one of our Council members, is Rector. We always hope that when a parish sees its picture on the Guild's materials, it will excite further interest! The other photograph on the back cover this time is that of Louis, the Great Pyrenees, the dog whom I mentioned in January during my discussion of the vocation of pastors. I had so many e-mails and enquiries about this dog that I thought some of you might like to see him!

I am always somewhat surprised when I meet Episcopalians or other Anglicans who say they don't believe in purgatory. Often they say this even though they *do* pray for the dead (which is very strange – why pray for people who have been sent straight to heaven or hell and have no recourse?). I think perhaps this reluctance to believe in purgatory is connected to mental images, either from art or poetry, connected to Dante's *Divine*

Comedy, particularly the *Purgatorio* and the *Inferno*. Readers and others influenced by this poem, and it has had an enormous effect on Western culture, sometimes forget that Dante is enlarging on a poetic imagination, which, while based on Catholic teaching, is not interchangeable with Catholic teaching. There is much which he has simply imagined, and the whole nature of Purgatory as a “miniature hell” with similar activities and similar staff is certainly not taught by the Church and never has been. What the Church teaches is simply that human beings tend not to be prepared at the end of this life for the fullest vision of God in Heaven. It would be a salutary and astonishing occurrence if they were. For all we know, it may never have happened except in the case of Our Lady, who of course was without either original or actual sin. Even the most well known Saints will have had sins on their consciences, and will have to have been purged of them. We know little about what goes on in Purgatory, but there is nothing to suggest that its nature is exactly like hell. Indeed, if a soul finds itself in Purgatory, it is a guarantee of future passage to heaven. As one of my catechism students said some years ago, “If you get to Purgatory, you’re home free, you always get to heaven after”!

The deeper theological meaning of Purgatory is a very attractive one, which makes it even sadder that some people have trouble with it. This truth is that God is not finished with us in this life. Unless we have fully, finally and definitively chosen Evil, with the full understanding of what we are doing (which must be an exceedingly rare thing), the Church teaches that there is still hope of salvation. Only God knows the condition of the soul and the intention of the person at the point of death, and God, through purgatory, manifests the truth that the grave is the bed of Hope. It is also true that Love, which is the only word which stands in equation with God, is stronger than Death. This was the fundamental truth of the Resurrection itself: that Love was stronger than Death, and that it was Love, both the Love of God the Father for His Son and his children, and the Love of God the Son in offering Himself a ransom for the sins of many, which not only conquered Death but led to the prospect, the possibility and the hope of Everlasting Life in Him. The love of relationships, both the relationship that we have with God as Our Father, with God the Son as our brother, redeemer and friend, and with God the Holy Ghost, for whom our bodies have been temples of indwelling, and also the relationships of Love we have amongst each other, that Love is stronger than the grave and goes beyond the gates of death. It is for this reason that we can pray for the dead, knowing that the love we manifest thereby is shared with God, and, we hope and trust, shared with them. The dead can no longer pray for themselves and for their own salvation, because that is in God’s hands. Neither can they pray for us, as they are engaged in their own purification at God’s hands. *But we can pray for them, and we know that these prayers are efficacious because God’s holy word tells us so.* Judas Maccabeus raised an offering to pray for the dead. Our Lord prayed for Lazarus when he had died. Our Lord’s Virgin Mother and the other holy women went to the tomb to pray for him.

We are connected with the dead by prayer because we are connected to the dead by Love.

This vision of Love beyond death is completed by the fact that once the Holy Souls have been fully purged of sin and prepared to meet God, they are then His Saints, surrounding his throne and worshipping the vision of the Holy Trinity for ever. At this point, *they can now pray for us, and we have no doubt that they do.* The cycle of Christ the King-All Saints-All Souls, all of which occur in one week, reminds us that Christ is the King of All. He is King of the living, because he has lived as one of us, and now reigns in Heaven still as Man as well as God. He is King of the dead, because he himself once died and knows the sting of death. It is he who purifies the dead through His Love and prepares them to meet His Father, and ours. He is King of the Saints, because they mirrored their lives on him, and their successful struggle has brought them to his Throne in Heaven. Prayer, which is really the communication of Love, is the great engine which brings all this together. It also binds the Church together, because its three “parts”, on earth still struggling, in purgatory being prepared, and in Heaven worshipping at the wedding feast of the Lamb. We speak of those parts of the Church because it helps us to understand, but in reality there is only One Church, and we are bound together in it by Love and Prayer, and by virtue of our Baptisms, which have made us part of the Body of Christ, and by such of the other six Sacraments as we have been favoured with receiving as gifts of God.

That's why I know that purgatory is real: because God's Love goes beyond the grave, because our love for the dead goes beyond the grave, because there is always Hope for God's children, and because we have been given reason by Scripture and Tradition to believe that even when this life is over, even though there is nothing more we can do to help ourselves, God is still not finished with us!

Yours in the Holy Souls,

(The Rev'd Canon) Barry E. B. Swain, SSC
Superior-General