

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

I begin by reminding you that the annual Requiem and meeting of the Council will take place on Saturday, 14 November at 11.00 a.m. at St Paul's Church, 2430 K Street N.W., Washington, D. C., by the kind invitation of Father Andrew Sloane, parish priest there, and a long-time and very faithful member of the Council. The Guild first met for its annual mass and meeting at St Paul's in 1964 (it surprised me to find it was not earlier!) on which occasion we were welcomed by Father Richards, the parish priest, Father Meisel (then Rector of Ascension & St Agnes, Washington) was the select preacher, and Father Maynard, then Superior and Dean of Milwaukee Cathedral, was the celebrant. As that was forty-five years ago, nearly everyone present is now dead, a salutary reminder that the Guild always has more members in purgatory (and we trust some in heaven!) than it has on earth. We have been four times to St Paul's since then, and we look forward to our next visit in November. If you are within striking distance of Washington, perhaps you could make your plans now to attend the mass. A catered reception in the atrium of St Paul's new building will follow. For those of you who do not know, they have just finished an extensive building programme which has made their already attractive buildings both more appealing and useful. Our preacher for the occasion will be Father Frederick Thomas, Rector of Grace & St Peter's, Baltimore, Maryland, a fairly new member of the Council but an old friend.

Our second piece of good news is that Father R. Trent Fraser of the Guild's Council has been instituted Rector of St John's Church, Newport, Rhode Island. St John's has a very long and firm Catholic tradition, and has had members of the Guild amongst its parishioners for many years. Oddly enough, it has never had a formally constituted branch and so with several members of the Guild in the parish and Father Fraser as first Branch Superior, it has pleased us (as Father Kunkel used to say!) to erect a branch in that parish. The branch will be under the dedication of St Nicholas, patron of sailors, an important saint in that seaside town of many sailors and a saint dear to the many Italians, Portuguese and Greeks who make up much of its citizenry. Our congratulations go to Father Fraser and indeed to the people of St John's in gaining a good and faithful parish priest.

As I write this in the first week of May, naturally the Virgin Mother of God is much on our minds. The May Festival in my own parish is this coming Saturday, and we shall again take the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham in procession around the block, to the astonishment of the secular and Jewish population of our neighbourhood and the delight of the Hispanic doormen! As we crown her in so many places around the world in this her month, we naturally think of her at various times in her life and the life of her Son, and indeed as she is now, as Queen of Heaven. One of the more exotic manifestations I have seen was at the Cathedral in Cagliari in Sardinia a few years ago. An attack of the bubonic

plague had seized Cagliari in its grip in the first years of the eighteenth century, and a panic naturally ensued. Hundreds of people on the island died, and by order of the Spanish Viceroy, who ruled the island for the Spanish King Philip V (the grandson of Louis XIV), no ships were allowed to embark from the island and no ships were willing to disembark there. There was therefore no escape, and the death toll was enormous. The Viceroy had only one plan to deal with the situation, a plan which might not meet with much approval if put into practice today with the swine flu, was to have processions every day from the public square by the harbour to the Cathedral piazza saying the Rosary. For fifteen days, the Rosary processions continued. On the sixteenth day, for the first day in many months, there were no deaths from the plague, and the epidemic died away thereafter as quickly as it had come. There was no doubt in the minds of the people of Cagliari that Our Lady had stayed the plague by her prayers, and they built in their Norman cathedral an altar of Our Lady of the Rosary in thanksgiving for her intercession. Up the left side of the highly exotic Baroque altarpiece are signs of death from the lives of Our Lord and Our Lady: St Joseph on his death bed with his wife and foster son attending, Lazarus in his tomb with Our Lord mourning with Mary Magdalene and Martha, the widow of Nain begging Our Lord for her Son, the Centurion begging Our Lord to heal his daughter far away, Our Lord himself dead and in his Mother's lap, and finally Our Lady herself on her deathbed with the twelve Apostles present. Up the right side of the altarpiece are scenes of the Resurrection of Our Lord, his Ascension into heaven, and Our Lady's Assumption. On the top, the most astonishing scene: Our Lady, sceptre in hand, leading a long queue of skeletons from the death side to the life side, and the inscription, not in Latin, the language of the Church, but in Spanish, the language of the people, "Queen of the Dead, lead us!"

It is an odd invocation in some ways, Queen of the Dead, and not one which I had seen before, but when we stop to consider it, we understand that Our Lady is always close to the dying, the dead and those who mourn. She knew sorrow and grief always, and the shadow of death which overshadowed her almost immediately after her child was born and Herod sought to destroy him, was to follow her for the rest of her life. At some point, St Joseph died and certainly a godly and righteous matron like her would have been often at deathbeds of her friends and family in a society with no doctors, no nurses and no hospitals. In a natural, agrarian society such as she lived in, death occurred in the home amongst one's loved ones, not in an institution shut away from people and heavily sanitised. For three years, she dreaded what might happen to her Son, who was being so outspoken in his criticism of the religious establishment. Finally the day came, and he was arrested, tortured, tried in a kangaroo court, and dragged to his death, forced to carry his own cross. She stood by the wayside, screwing up her courage to give what support she could. When he was taken down from the cross, it was she who received him, and with the other holy women, laid him in his borrowed tomb. She is certainly Queen of the Dead

and of those who mourn, for she knows exactly what they feel and what they endure. But as certainly as she is Queen of the Dead, she is also Queen of the Living, and as she helped her Son, his lifeless body in her arms, in the moment of death, so she helps all those who call her Mother in the hour of their deaths. How many thousands of times in our lives have we prayed, "Pray for us now and at the hour of our death"? And what is it that we really pray for when we utter that phrase? It is, I suppose, for her to lead us, as she leads those skeletons from one side of the altar to the other, from death to life, interceding for us to her Son and to God the Father, remembering the moments when she felt what we feel, and knowing that we are now as she once was, and praying that, by the mercy of God, we shall be as she is now. So perhaps Queen of the Dead isn't really that strange after all. We know that her intercession is powerful, and that she longs to help and to love, as all good mothers do. Did her intercession save the people of Sardinia from further deaths from the plague? We cannot know. The people of Cagliari felt with all their hearts that she did save them by her prayers, which showed them the love of a Mother, and that God was good and merciful. Perhaps that was what was most important anyway.

Yours in the Holy Souls,