

NEWSLETTER 18 : February - April 2007

Monastery of St Barnabas the Encourager.

DIARY DATES

Our Monthly Eucharist/Communion

will be on the third Sunday of each month at 8.00 am.

February 18th - March 18th - April 15th - The service is followed by Communion Breakfast in the Community Kitchen.

Eucharist can be celebrated at other times by arrangement.



Letter from the Resident Anchorite, Father Bryan.

Just how do people regard Jesus? This aspect of faith was going round in my mind throughout the Christmas period. For so many people just the mention of his name is a "Switch off".

On the other hand there are those for whom Jesus is the centre of their lives: God is alive in them consciously and unconsciously. His presence is felt particularly in times of need. Those who have this experience feel compassion for others and a desire to share their own understandings with them.

There is yet another group of people who feel very uncomfortable when they meet Christians with real certainty about the nearness and presence of Jesus. They often feel more in control with abstractions and meditative methods and practices without the commitment to belief or faith in Jesus.

Of course the Christian faith requires considerable discipline and perseverance and with which those seeking a deepening of their spiritual understanding need to engage. The traditional churches, rich in spiritual treasures have so much to offer from their traditional store but how careful all Christians should be to keep their eyes upon Jesus. There seem to be many people attending the old traditional churches who tend to feel uncomfortable with those who talk about Jesus in intimate terms; some who can only appreciate Jesus from an intellectual point of view. Perhaps

it is only the accepted brilliant academics like Rowan Williams who can, while talking in simple terms, reach both the ordinary person and the academic by his own real experience of Jesus as well as his intellectual understanding.

It is in many of the traditional churches I see declining numbers while the congregations of the evangelical style churches are growing.

I observe it is in the evangelical churches that there is such an expectation that prayers will be answered, that it is usual to find mid-week meetings are arranged for prayer and fellowship, quite apart from their prayers on Sundays during worship.

I am reminded of that old chorus:-

'He walks with me, He talks with me, Along life's narrow way.....' My adopted Godfather used to sing it, a man of few words. He had things to say but never spoke for the sake of talking. He fearlessly spoke of Jesus



when questioned or to reinforce a moral stand. When he was dying, suffering with cancer and in great pain he

wanted above all to tell everyone of their need to know Jesus.

I feel concern for the many well educated people who tentatively explore the 'spiritual' but avoid anything traditionally religious and recoil and become seriously embarrassed if asked if they have they have any real contact with Jesus, although those with troubles are sometimes more receptive .

George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement walked much of Britain at a time when he was hungry to find God. He said he visited 'professors and religious worthies' but

none could, as he put it" Speak to my condition" Then, when he could find no one to help him he said " I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition"

Metropolitan Anthony of the Russian church, by a series of events, came to a point where he became aware of a presence that he recognised as Christ standing by him as he read St. Mark's gospel. Many people's testimonies start by recounting the day they experienced the living God in their lives, understood in the person of Jesus. My own encounter was not unlike that of Metropolitan Anthony. Of course, such experiences are as diverse as people are different from one another.

The gambling, drinking, night club saxophone player, Jimmy Carter, when he had his experience of Jesus putting his life back on track he began to sing hymns. He sings with passion that chorus 'He touched me and made me whole'

Jesus said 'Those who are not ashamed to confess Jesus before others I will not be ashamed to confess before my heavenly father' (Mt.10:32.)

Jesus commends the faith of the simple (Mt.11:25.)

My heart goes out to those who look to abstract philosophies and navel gazing, and to those who are involved in the many attractions of the material world, slotting any expressions of the Christian faith into an hour on Sundays, Christmas and possibly, Easter.

Perhaps it is those who have experienced life's hardships and have come to the end of their own resources who are in a more acceptable frame of mind to experience a relationship with Jesus and see God as Father.

Fr. Bryan

Abstracts from C.S. Lewis "Mere Christianity"

Theology: the Science of God

In a way I understand why some people are put off by Theology.

I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard bitten officer got up and said. "I've no use for all that stuff. But mind you, I'm, a religious man too. I know there's a God. I've felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal."

Now in a sense I quite agreed with that man. I think he had quite a real experience of God in the desert. And when he turned from that experience to the Christian creeds, I think he was turning from something real to something less real. In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then he goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from

something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of coloured paper. But here comes the point. The map is admittedly only coloured paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks along the beach, your own experience is far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be of more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.

Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.

Matt.22:29

(from Through the Year with Watchman Nee)

When Herod asked the priests and scribes where the Christ should be born, they at once recited from memory the prophet's words

"In Bethlehem of Judea" How well they knew their scriptures! They could give an immediate answer when called upon. And was their reply wrong? Not at all. Yet this was the surprising thing that after they had answered the question, not one of those scribes or elders set out for Bethlehem. What they knew was quite accurate; nevertheless they only used it to point the way to the magi and then went back to their books. They functioned like a traffic policeman who directs people to where they want to go, but himself remains at his post. This will not do. It is not enough to just know the Bible; we must also know the power of God. Understanding what he says in the scriptures is not sufficient if it does not lead us to know God himself. We need to have personal dealings with Him, acting on His words in faith. The pathway to the knowledge of God is through such actions. There is no other way.

ACTING WARDENS REPORT

The trend of the Monastery over the past year has been towards being a a spiritual resource for the local churches and community. Apparently many locals had not registered that there was a monastery at Brynmawr until recently. The meeting room has been used for a number of gatherings. The monastery had an Advent retreat led by Gary & Sian Hiscott. This was excellent and very professionally presented Unfortunately, that event was only attended by three members of their own church in addition to ourselves. Perhaps there will be some other initiatives from members of 'Friends of the Monastery' in the coming year.

Guests and visitors had hitherto come from further a field. Although a number still come from distant places, they are few in number.

You may have read in the last newsletter that Rowan had started a degree course and, at the same time, was moving house. Under those circumstances we gratefully accepted help from Gary Hiscott who sent out the last newsletter and from Dorothy for reading, with a critical eye, the Warden's report and the resident Anchorite's letter.



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