



# Our Lady & St Joseph's Parish Bulletin

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FIFTH SUNDAY OF  
ORDINARY TIME  
FEBRUARY 8TH 2004



**THIS WEEK'S MUSIC.** Entry 708 *Holy God we Praise thy Name* Offertory 874 *Take my Life*  
Communion 161 *Jesus the Word* Recessional 853 *Forth in the Peace*

## PARISH FORUM

WEDNESDAY EVENING at NEWMAN. 7.0pm

No sooner have we got the DEANERY FORUM out of the way than there is another important meeting this week, this time for the Parish. First of all the DEANERY FORUM. Most thought it was a very successful evening; there was certainly a good number attending. At the back of church you can find a report of the proceedings. Take a copy, because we hope to have a follow up to this meeting in several weeks' time when the hope is that we can establish a Deanery Pastoral Council. Meanwhile, back at our own parish we have our annual PARISH FORUM on Wednesday. There's a lot to talk about, including the Waterton Hall, the Youth Worker Project, the Lottery Grant we have received, vacancies on the Parish Pastoral Committee, the Parish Skills Audit, and the repercussions of Tuesday's Deanery Forum on our own parish. **BE AN ACTIVE PART OF YOUR PARISH AND TRY TO BE THERE** - everybody has something worthwhile to contribute and we hope you will have your say.

There's an extra collection today at the end of Mass for the CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICES. This is the national body which on behalf of all Catholics looks after the welfare of our schools and deals with the Government on educational matters.

There's a meeting of all altar servers after the 10.0 Mass today, and Fr William would be interested in recruiting any other youngsters who would like to join the altar staff. They can come too.

**WEDNESDAY IS THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES. SHE IS THE PATRONESS OF OUR DIOCESE.**

There are quite a number of students from overseas in our parish. The clergy and the Justice and Peace Group thought it would be good to have a little social occasion for them in the Rectory in the next couple of weeks. Maybe some of them could let us know which is the best day in the week for them to be there.



We have MORNING PRAYER at 9.0 and EVENING PRAYER at 6.0 every weekday. A small loyal group comes daily. With Lent coming up perhaps more would care to join us.

DOMINIC MILROY

# Follow that balloon

A monk of Ampleforth travelling on a London underground train witnessed a simple but astonishing gesture. He offers the story as a Christmas parable

How far that little candle throws his beams!  
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

PORTIA's words from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* came alive for me a few years ago, on a grey day in London just before Christmas. It was cold, it was raining, and it was evening rush hour. I went underground to travel on the Tube, but the escalators at the busy north London junction, King's Cross, were not working. The platforms were awash with damp, silent and irritated people. Once inside the packed carriage, there was a claustrophobic sense of non-community and alienation, a press of isolated solitudes.

Like most others, I kept myself apart, carefully avoiding eye-contact by examining the advertisements for cough-mixture, foreign holidays and mobile phones. As the train stopped at Euston, my eye was caught by a splash of colour at the far end of the carriage. Two very large balloons, one red, the other blue, floated above the heads of new entrants to the train - a black family, very well-dressed, with twin sons aged about

ten, who were clearly delighted with their trophies. They were not just any old balloons, but special Christmas balloons, on polished wooden sticks with gold knobs at the top. The lugubrious mood of the carriage was, ever so slightly, lightened.

At the next stop, Warren Street, the heavy silence was shattered by the arrival, right next to me, of a fair-haired little girl of about seven who was screaming as she clutched her father's jacket. She was a Down's Syndrome child. There was nothing anyone could do to comfort her, and everyone was simply trying to pretend that she wasn't there. Everyone, that is, except the boy with the red balloon. First, I noticed him standing on tiptoe, with a look of concern as he tried to identify the source of the tears. Then he disappeared, but the red balloon started making a hesitant journey down the carriage, held aloft above the heads of the crowd. As we reached Oxford Circus and the doors opened, the little black boy appeared next to me and stood in front of the little girl. As even more people struggled into the carriage, he said, in quite a loud and grave voice (the first words uttered since King's Cross): "Hello, this is for you. Happy

Christmas. Goodbye." Then he disappeared back into the crowd.

The effect was instantaneous, electric and cumulative. Everyone heard the words and turned to look at what was happening. The little girl stopped crying, clutched the balloon and started to show it to her father, to me and to all her neighbours. That was what we had suddenly become: neighbours. By the time we reached our destination, the mainline rail station at Victoria, we were wishing each other Happy Christmas and almost exchanging addresses.

It seemed astonishing, at the time, that one small gesture could change the sense of everybody's grim and silent alienation into the sudden warmth of community. The carriage had been invaded by a sense of celebration and had the glow of a small cathedral. People were looking at each other, making jokes about the weather, and basking in the radiance of the little girl's laughter.

The truth is, of course, that the gesture had not been a small one, but a very big one. I don't

know, of course, whether the boy was Christian, or Muslim or "agnostic", but what was clear was that he had quite simply given away, to a complete stranger, what was at that moment his most precious possession. Although he had done so publicly, he had acted with manifest spontaneity and unobserved by his parents. For those of us who were near, it had been a moment of pure and beautiful serendipity which took everyone completely by surprise.

We all had the sense that what had happened was important. How might the world be changed if everyone acted like this?

But it also had the unmistakable glow of something deeper than mere kindness. The boy had gone out of his way, in unpropitious circumstances, to seek out not only a total stranger but one who was suffering and marginalised. If he was the kind of person who liked giving things away, the natural thing would have been to hold on to his balloon for the moment, and give it later to his best friend. His gesture was not only human, it was also heroic.

I was reminded of St Matthew's gospel:

When you did this to the least of my brothers, you did it to me.

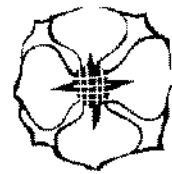


St Matthew had opened his account of Christ's preaching with the Sermon on the Mount, which is, in most respects, a lesson on how to be fully human. It reaches its climax in chapter 25, which represents an invitation to go further, to recognise the invisible presence of God in the poverty and the neediness of the stranger. What we had witnessed was not only an updated and living version of the parable of the Good Samaritan but also a kind of sacrament, a divine presence made real; an outward sign of inward grace.

The witnesses on the London Underground sensed also, I think, that it was curiously apt that the giver was black and the receiver white; this represented a gently courteous inversion of "Third World" status. "One word of truth", said the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his Nobel prize speech, "outweighs the whole world." The boy's gesture was a word of truth, as well as of goodness and beauty, and it was surely this bringing together of the great classical "transcendentals" that so moved the grumpy rush-hour crowd.

Fortunately, the world, secular as well as religious, is full of moments like this. Often they go unobserved and unappreciated. This is exactly the point that St Matthew is making, that those who serve God best are frequently unaware that they are doing so. The boy who gave away his red balloon may well have ended up being blamed by his parents for losing it. But the rest of us had our moment of theophany.

Christmas came early to the Victoria Line that evening.



## MASS INTENTIONS FOR THIS WEEK

SAT	6.0	(Alston) The Parish
SUN	10.0	Alice McGeever
	4.30	Ints of Anne & Steve
MON	12.10	Elise Stitt
TUE	8.0	Scott Baritt
	12.10	REQUIEM Frances Hartley
WED	9.15	(St Gab) Thomas Kelly
	12.10	Anne Sturdy
THU	8.0	Kathleen Poland
	9.15	(School) Mary Frazer
	12.10	Gerry Kirk
FRI	8.0	Mildred Weild
	12.10	Peggy Dixon
SAT	12.10	Michael, Bob, Paul Reay
	6.0	(Alston) The parish
SUN	10.0	Teresa Turner
	4.30	Rene George

PLEASE PRAY FOR Christine Dale and Mabel Harrison who are sick; for Frances Hartley (Melbourne Rd - Requiem Tues 12.10; Reception Monday 5.30) and Rene George (once of this parish) who died recently, and for Anne Sturdy, Peggy Dixon, Teresa Turner and Gerry Kirk whose anniversaries are about now.