

THE OSCOTIAN



2025-2026

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St Mary's College, Oscott



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Canon
Michael Dolman

Rector
St Mary's College,
Oscott

Foreword

FROM THE RECTOR

Welcome to the 2025-26 edition of the Oscotian Magazine. Looking back over the formation year, some significant moments and developments stand out. In November, we hosted two eastern rite ordinations in our chapel: Tenny Antony was ordained in the Syro-Malabar rite and Jithin Titto in the Syro-Malankara rite. It is thought to be the first time that ordinations in the eastern rites have been celebrated in our chapel, and is a sign of the growing diversity of the Catholic community in these lands. That diversity – and unity – was very evident last July, when the college hosted the inaugural WeBelieve festival. This was a beautiful and inspiring event which drew together so many different aspects of the life of the Catholic Church in our country, gathering in one place multiple Catholic groups, and celebrating our shared faith in such diverse ways. You can read more about the festival, and the ordinations, in the magazine.

Over the last year we have begun a process of review of the seminary formation programme at Oscott. In a rapidly changing society and with a swiftly developing ecclesial context, we need to be sure that the programme equips future priests not just for the Church today, but for the decades to come. We have undertaken a national consultation process, involving seminarians, formation staff, bishops, vocations directors and priests from different generations, to better understand the current and anticipated needs of the Church in our country. The review process will continue for another year, as we seek to find practical ways of responding to the points raised in the consultation. Please keep this process in your prayers.

On 1 September, the Maryvale Institute, which provides formation to lay people, became part of the Oscott CIO (our charitable Trust). Whilst the Maryvale programmes are all distance learning, and will remain quite distinct from the formation for priesthood and diaconate which takes place at Oscott, there is a new opportunity to share some of the seminary's resources to help in the formation of the lay faithful, and so further support the mission of the Church. You can find more about what Maryvale offers at www.maryvale.ac.uk.

This year's Oscotian is centred on the theme of beauty and its many expressions in our lives. Appreciation of beauty is a gift given only to human beings, out of all God's creatures. It is part of what it means to be created in the likeness of God. We are blessed with much beauty in the Oscott environment – the magnificent chapel and the beauty of our grounds, for example – and these help to lift our hearts and minds to God. Genuine beauty, wherever it is found, is a window on the divine. I am grateful to the seminarians who served as the editorial committee this year: Conor Jones, Eamonn Kennedy, Lukas Mickevičius and Renver Peña. My thanks also to those who provided articles and images for the magazine, and to the team at Peter's House for the design. I hope you enjoy reading these articles and discovering a little more about life at St Mary's College.



CALLED TO TR

Reflections on the WeBelieve Festival by John Withers, Festival Organiser



24-27 July 2025, Oscott hosted the inaugural WeBelieve Festival, a joyful gathering of the UK Catholic community in all its diversity. Centred around the themes of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, the festival gave opportunities for friendship, learning and spiritual growth. Here John Withers, who oversaw the organisation of the festival on behalf of the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, reflects on the theme of beauty at WeBelieve.

RANSCENDENCE

For the WeBelieve Festival, we found ourselves returning again and again to the transcendentals: truth, goodness and beauty. These are not abstract ideas floating somewhere above ordinary life, but the ways in which God becomes discoverable to us in the everyday. Each of us experiences moments of truth, goodness and beauty that suddenly seem to open out into something deeper.

Beauty arrests us. It slows us down. It opens the imagination and awakens longing. St John Paul II, in his Letter to Artists, wrote that “beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence.” Beauty draws us out of ourselves, reminding us that the world is charged with meaning and that creation itself bears the fingerprints of God.

At the WeBelieve Festival, the Beauty Marquee exists to create space for that encounter. Practically speaking, it gathers together sacred art, sacred music and Catholic poetry, with a particular focus on the rich and often overlooked story of British Catholic culture. There is a deep well here that many of us are only just beginning to rediscover: recusant poets, sacred composers, monastic craftsmanship, contemporary iconographers, novelists, architects and artists who have carried the Catholic imagination through centuries of British life. Like few other places, Oscott itself is a living reminder of this rich heritage and promise.

In the art sessions, the marquee moves between studies of extraordinary works of art and contemplative seminars reflecting on sacred compositions by contemporary artists. The emphasis is less on critique and more on contemplation. What does this work reveal? What does it awaken? What might God be saying through it? As with the visual stained-glass “Bibles for the poor”, there is a catechetical element to much of this content.

Music, too, sits at the very heart of the experience. Liturgical music is not decoration for the Mass; it is a living part of worship itself, ordered towards the glorification of God and the sanctification of His people. Pope Benedict XVI often spoke about the unique power of music to lead the human heart towards God, writing that the encounter with beauty can become “a wound of the arrow that strikes the heart.” Anyone who attended the 2025 festival choir performances will know exactly what he meant. The sound of polyphony filling the space - voices rising and folding together in impossible harmony - has stayed in the minds of many ever since. Alongside the recitals come chant workshops and introductions to sacred music, reminding us that sacred music is not a museum piece. It is alive.

Poetry, meanwhile, is quietly becoming one of the defining features of the *WeBelieve* experience. Poets are on the rise again, and we need them. One of the most memorable sessions of last summer’s festival was a simple Poetry Evening, gathering contributions from wise monks, relatable friars, contemplative sisters and energetic young poets. There was humour, honesty, silence, longing, wisdom and wonder all held together in one room. Poetry has a way of saying what ordinary speech cannot. It creates space for mystery.

And perhaps that is what the Beauty Marquee is ultimately for: creating space for mystery. A space to rouse wonder and awe in the hearts and minds of festival-goers. A space to open up some blue sky above the noise and distraction of ordinary life. A space to recover the imagination not as escapism, but as a place where God dwells.

Place yourself before beauty. Wait. What rises in the heart? What questions emerge? What is God stirring within you?

“Beauty
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NEWMAN, DOCTO

Rome, 1 November 2025

Deacon Harry Schnitker is the Director of Maryvale HIRS



It is said that we do not pick our saints, but that they pick us. This is certainly true of Newman. Before I first came to Birmingham in 2009, he was a name from a biography. Then I slept in his room at Maryvale House, became involved in the organization of Pope Benedict's visit to Britain, and only just missed out being in Rome for the canonization. I did make it for his elevation as Doctor of the Church, however, as I happened to be in the Eternal City for the Jubilee of Catholic educators. Newman was everywhere that week in Rome in October

2025: his thinking has deeply influenced Pope Leo and it showed in all the documents on Catholic education. His influence on me is equally profound.

There is one thing, however, that I do not share with Newman: my unambiguous love of Rome. Quite frankly, there is no other city that sweeps me off my feet quite like Rome. It is not just one thing that captures me: it is the barbershop with the Padre Pio statue, the police officer on the Piazza Farnese

R OF THE CHURCH

buying me a drink since I work with the Bridgettine Sisters, the beggar who stops to ask me if I think that St Augustine was correct on original sin, the shocking vulgarity of the Colosseum, the tenderness of Santa Maria in Trastevere, the religious in their habits, the young flaunting their God-given beauty, the tomb of St Peter – Rome is an intoxicating maelstrom of sensory overkill, the embodiment of the Kingdom of God.

Now it is true that Newman was amazed at its beauty, a beauty that is still largely unchanged since he stood on a hill above the Tiber when “all the many domes, which gave feature to the view before us, rose gracefully and proud”. Unlike most European cities, Rome was not broken by the Second World War, and has not seen its ancient buildings dwarfed by steel-and-glass-and-concrete towers. But Rome to Newman was a complex thing.

In his *Home Thoughts Abroad* Newman communicated what his impressions of Rome were. The title says much: it prefigures the somewhat later *Home Thoughts from Abroad* by the poet, Robert Browning, with its famous line “Oh to be in England / Now April is there”, written in Italy. Not only does it share a title, it shares a sentiment. Newman, like Browning, felt a little alienated in Italy, which was not unusual for nineteenth-century Englishmen.

Yet Rome is a demanding presence. To his sister, Harriet, he wrote:

“And now what [can] I say of Rome, but that it is of all cities the first, and that all I ever saw are but as dust, even dear Oxford inclusive, compared with its majesty and glory. In St Peter’s yesterday, and St John Lateran today, I have felt quite abased, chiefly by their enormous size, which added to the extreme

accuracy and grace of their proportions makes one seem quite little and contemptible.”

Was this a subconscious expression of the Anglican feeling overwhelmed by the Catholic? His struggles are obvious – he could not but admire the fact that this was the home of the Apostles and the early Church, but could not shake the feeling that somehow old, pagan Rome was still polluting the Church. Rome, he felt, was going to be judged severely at the end of times, which he felt were near.

Yet the contradictions haunt him on every page of his *Home Thoughts*. For he could not escape his admiration for the beauty of the Classical world that he encountered in Rome, and, being a child of his time and therefore imbued with Classical learning, heard the voices of Antiquity wherever he went in the Eternal City. And worse, pagan Antiquity was not the only siren voice. He was mesmerised by the saints of Antiquity, visited their tombs and churches, and felt the seductive voice that told him that this was without doubt the heart of Christendom.

I wonder what he would have made of the beautiful Mass during which he was elevated as Doctor of the Church? The huge banner with his portrait dangling from the façade of St Peter’s showed him smiling that Mona Lisa-esque smile, a wry face that gives little away except perhaps bemusement. The square was filled to the brim, many of those attending from Britain, lit by the late autumn sun of Rome, the colonnades embracing the multitude expressing in stone the Church’s love that was also explicit in the blessing arms of Pope Leo. I have a feeling that the bemused confusion that Rome occasioned in him has gone: the Englishman is now a voice of the universal Church, at home in the Eternal City.

DIACONATE ORDINATION IN THE SYRO-MALABAR RITE AT OSCOTT

Deacon Tenny Antony, ordained at Oscott in the Syro-Malabar rite on 21 November 2025.



I was blessed last year to be ordained a deacon in our beloved chapel at Oscott. The service took place in the Syro-Malabar rite, one of the twenty-three Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with Rome. The Syro-Malabar Church traces its origins to St Thomas the Apostle, who evangelised India between 42 and 72 AD. Its liturgy comes from the East Syriac tradition: deeply biblical, ancient, and rich in symbolism.

It was the very first time in our college history that such an Oriental ordination had taken place. Because of this, the day carried a particular sense of grace and wonder. I remain deeply grateful to Archbishop Bernard, Bishop Mar Joseph, and Fr Rector for making it possible. It was also a great blessing to share that moment with family, friends, priests, and the seminary community, all gathered in prayer around the chapel. The chapel was decorated in the tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church.

From the beginning, I sensed that this ordination was not simply the giving of a ministry. It was the Church quietly revealing what the diaconate truly is. Through the ancient East Syriac tradition, I could see that

service begins at the altar and then flows into the world. The deacon is not first a speaker or assistant. He is a *m'shamshana* — one who serves the Holy Mysteries. The deacon stands in the space between the Madbaha (High altar) and the gathered faithful. Thus, his role is to guide the people into entering the Qurbana. In this tradition, earthly worship is joined to heavenly worship. The sanctuary is not merely a place where sacred actions happen; it becomes a sign of heaven opened before the people of God.

One of the most moving moments came when Mar Joseph took me by the hand and led me towards the space before the high altar. That simple gesture said more than many words could. I was not walking forward alone. I was being brought forward by the Church, received by the Church, and offered to God. It was a moment of surrender. My whole heart was ready to offer the years left in my life for God and his people. All these years of formation enabled me to say yes with freedom.

Another movement was the prostration before the Bishop and the Madbaha, the high altar. These gestures spoke with quiet

power. They expressed humility, surrender, and the truth that no one approaches the Holy Mysteries by right. One requires the holiness and humility God grants to stand and serve at the Madbaha.

At the centre of the ordination was the imposition of hands. The diaconate is the first of the three sacred ministries in which the Holy Spirit is called down upon the candidate. In that moment, I remember feeling immense peace. There was nothing left for me to hold on to. I had let go completely and fallen into the hands of the Lord. The prayers of imposition were deeply beautiful, especially the second prayer, which asks God to help the deacon serve with a clean heart and an upright conscience. Those words stayed with me. They reminded me that sacred ministry is not built on talent, status, or confidence, but on grace, purity of heart, and fidelity.

Then came the vesting. I remember a powerful joy when Bishop Mar Joseph placed the stole on my left shoulder. The stole symbolises the works of justice and the call to adorn one's soul with pure works of sanctity. It was not simply a vestment placed upon me; it was an invitation to let my life be clothed in service to the Church. I was then presented with the Book of the Epistles, since it is the deacon's role to read the Holy Epistles at the Holy Qurbana. To receive that book was to be entrusted with the Word of God. The deacon does not proclaim himself. He lends his voice to the Word, so that Christ may speak to his people.

After these sacred moments, the Archdeacon, who is a priest, led me to the high altar

so that I may venerate the Madbaha. This symbolises taking possession of the sacred space where deacons are to minister. Until this moment, those who are not deacons, priests, or bishops may not approach the Madbaha. To kiss the altar was a moment of awe, a silent promise to serve the Mysteries with reverence and love.

As I stood there, I was overwhelmed by how much the Lord had done for me. I thought of the years of formation at Oscott and how gently Christ had carried me through them. My whole life seemed to pass before me. I saw not my own strength, but God's providence; not my own achievement, but his immense care.

Being a follower of Jesus is something I am immensely proud of, not with worldly pride but with deep gratitude and wonder. I am profoundly grateful to Christ and his Church for choosing me and setting me apart to serve as a deacon. I never thought I would make it this far, but this journey has shown me the power of grace when we rely on it more completely. I was overjoyed to see my family and close friends and to hear about their experiences of this ordination. So many lives have supported me throughout this journey and brought me to this point, where I am one step away from the sacred priesthood. I can see God's power bringing people to my help whenever I was in need. I am extremely grateful for everything. All these years of formation, all that I have achieved is a gift, nothing that I have earned out of my strength but through his mercy. To God be all the glory!



THE BEAUTY OF THE ORDINATION LITURGY OF THE SYRO-MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH

Deacon Jithin Titto, ordained deacon at Oscott in the Syro-Malankara rite on 28 November 2025



The ordination liturgy of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church is one of the most beautiful sacramental liturgies that are characterised by its adherence to tradition, theology, and the expression of the doctrinal foundation of the Church. Every ritual element in the ordination expresses both the transcendence of God and His compassionate mercy, emphasising that ordination is not granted by human merit but through a divine call bestowed by grace. The ordination liturgy is unfolded in the Eucharistic liturgy emphasising its deep sacramental, scriptural, sacrificial and communal value.

The liturgy begins with **Omologio** (Exhortation) and profession of faith in which the bishop sits on his throne which signifies the apostolic authority and continuity. The candidate kneels before the altar to emphasise the gesture of humility, surrender and willingness to be guided by God. It also signifies a lifelong commitment of the candidate to enlighten, purify and guide the people of God. Through the exhortation, the

bishop reminds that the ministry pursued by the candidate is not self-assumed but received from the Church through the successors of the Apostles. The bishop exhorts the candidate to uphold the faith and to live in humility which highlights that the priesthood or diaconate is a ministry of obedience, fidelity to the teachings of the Church, moreover it is surrender to God's will rather than personal desire. In response to the exhortation of the bishop, the candidate publicly professes his obedience and promises to live in chastity and a celibate life. This promise is not only disciplinary but signifies a theology of total commitment to God.

The **act of tonsuring** is one of the profound acts of beauty in the ordination liturgy. It recalls the monastic traditions and highlights the commitment to the asceticism and self-denial. The tonsuring of the hair in the form of cross symbolises the rejection or renunciation of the worldly passions and self-centred desires. It also reflects the interior conversion and offering one's entire life to God.

The core part of the ordination service is the **prayers and hymns of thanksgiving and supplication**. The Church gives thanks to God's call to the candidate, which reminds us that vocation is a gift and not an achievement merited by the human. Simultaneously, the Church seeks God's mercy for the bishop and the candidate, affirming that only through divine grace is the priestly ministry sustained. This way of gratitude and humility is deeply rooted in the heart of Syriac spirituality.

The most important and sacramental core of the ordination is that the bishop lays the **imposition of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit** over the candidate. It emphasises the transmission of Apostolic grace to the candidate that establishes an unbroken lineage of the priesthood. Here, the bishop covers the candidate with his cope or the liturgical vestments which symbolizes the spiritual protection and incorporating the candidate to the pastoral mission of the Church. The bishop invokes the descent of the Holy Spirit by drawing power from the Holy Mysteries, and it affirms that it is the

Spirit rather than human strength or human ability who enables candidates to fulfil their responsibilities and services. The ritual actions of breathing, covering, touching, and praying that are included in this moment signify Christ imparting the Spirit to the Apostles, thereby making the ordination as a continuation of Pentecost.

The final rites of the ordination liturgy conclude with the **blessing of the stole, and the vesting of the newly ordained candidate**. These signify his new role, identity and authority within the liturgical life of the Church. The bishop authorises the candidate to **incense the congregation**. The **offering of incense** by the ordained represents his first act, role and responsibility of his ministry. It symbolizes the prayer rising to God and the call to sanctify the world through his humble service. Overall, the ordination liturgy manifests a radiant harmony of mystery, reverence, and hope, revealing the Church's faith in God who raises the weak to serve His glory.



THE BEAUTY OF FRIENDSHIP

Eamonn Kennedy is a second year seminarian for the Diocese of Shrewsbury

The beauty of seminary life is often seen in prayer, study, and the liturgy. Yet some of the most beautiful moments can be found in friendships and shared laughter. Living together each day allows friendships to grow naturally. These relationships are not just a bonus of seminary life; they are an important part of formation. Through friendship, seminarians learn how to support one another, to be honest, and to grow together in joy.

I am very fortunate to have many friends here at St Mary's College, not just in my own year group but also with seminarians from other year groups. You might gather with one or two friends in your room or have a social event in the college where you can mingle with those friends you may not have had the opportunity to spend time with often. These opportunities for fellowship, both informal and organised, strengthen the sense of community at the seminary and allow friendships to grow naturally across year groups, enriching our life together as a college.

Personally, a key advantage of seminary life is the chance to interact with students from different ministry backgrounds and church settings. The classroom becomes a vibrant learning space where knowledge can be gained not only from professors and books but also from peer-to-peer exchanges. In this seminary, apart from those training for the Roman rite, we are very fortunate to have someone training for the Syro-Malabar rite and someone training for the Ukrainian Catholic rite (Byzantine). Befriending fellow seminary students opens up to us different perspectives and ways of approaching ministry while helping us hold fast to the core tenets of our faith. By observing how others live out their calling, I am encouraged to think creatively about how we, too, might serve God and our communities.

Beyond expanding our perspectives and fostering collaboration, of course the

friendships formed in seminary become an essential source of support when challenges inevitably arise. Seminary life can be demanding, shaped by academic rigour, unique demands, and pressures. As St. Maximilian Kolbe once said: 'God sends us friends to be our firm support in the whirlpool of struggle.' Having a community of peers who share and understand these experiences offers invaluable encouragement, especially those who are perhaps higher up in the house who have plentiful experience. All of my brothers are the people who will pray alongside me, offer reassurance, and remind me of the vocation I am called to lead, even when the journey feels difficult. Knowing that others genuinely care about your well-being and growth in ministry can make a profound difference during moments of fatigue or discouragement.

Genuine friendships create spaces where you can be yourself without fear or judgement. Being accepted in your limitations, and mistakes allows you to engage honestly in formation. Walking alongside others through academic demands, spiritual growth, and personal challenges nurtures shared maturity and resilience, especially when differences or conflict arise. Therefore, this helps one recognise your God-given gifts, worth, and calling more clearly.

Finally, laughter plays a key role in the beauty of friendship. After long hours of your daily workload, laughter helps break stress and reminds me that joy belongs in the life of faith. Through laughter, true friendships really start to develop and materialise, and it must be noted that laughing together does not take away from the seriousness of a vocation. Instead, it shows trust in God and confidence that His grace is at work. As St Thomas Aquinas once said – 'there is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.'



THE BEAUTY OF FATHERHOOD

Jaison Lukose is a fifth year seminarian for the Syro-Malabar Eparchy

We often associate the father to be the one who protects, one who imparts wisdom and one who provides. This image of fatherhood is quite rightly modelled on God who provides the lamb for the sacrifice to Abraham and helps Israelites in their various need during their exodus. Even the Christian fatherhood which is a continuation from the OT is modelled on God the Father whom Jesus revealed to us. By focusing on the certain responsibilities of the father, we can often miss out on the beauty that a father portrays.

Beauty is not only to be associated with a lady but there is also beauty in Men. From the moment of their conception as a boy to their maturity into manhood and even beyond into one's fatherhood, men portray the beauty of God in whose image and likeness he is made.

Yes, it is true that this beauty is not expressed in the same way as it would be in the feminine. Nevertheless it is a beauty rooted firmly in God which all humanity desires. When we come in contact with such beauty, our response will be like St Augustine who said: "Late have I loved you, O beauty ever ancient." Such an encounter with God will move us beyond the externals of this world and into the interior depth of our souls where God abides.

We will be moved to create a clean heart for God where he can reign as closely as possible to his dwelling in heaven. We know that nothing unclean will enter that place (Revelation 21:27) and God will not enter a heart where there is impurity and other evil desires. We see this in the case of Mary who was preserved to be immaculate from the moment of her conception. Hence God was pleased to dwell in her because she was full of grace and immaculate.

Within the tradition of the Church we call her "Tota Pulchra" or "Total Beauty". This is not only because she gave birth to the God-man Jesus but also because she reflected the beauty of the God whom she possessed unlike any other creature. Yet, even with all

her glories, Mary wasn't alone in her journey, God had given her a faithful companion in St Joseph.

As Christians, we not only have a duty to portray beauty in the world but also have the duty to protect and safeguard the beauty that surrounds us. As Christians, do we portray this beauty of God to others? Even more, do we portray the beauty of Christian Fatherhood to others?

At the root of becoming and being a father is the love that one shares for his children. It is a love that must be received from God the Father who is the Father of all (almighty).

From the moment of their conception as a boy to their maturity into manhood and even beyond into one's fatherhood, men portrays the beauty of God in whose image and likeness he is made.



THE SONG OF SONGS

“All kinds of Everything Remind me of You”

Fr Rob Taylerson Spiritual Director



Picture Bing AI generated representation of “Song of Songs Chapter 4”

In the year 1970 the Irish singer, Dana Rosemary Scallan, won the Eurovision Song Contest in Amsterdam with a song entitled “All kinds of Everything [...remind me of you]”. The song’s content made it clear that whatever the eyes of the lover fell upon, it caused the beloved to spring to mind (...wishing-wells, wedding bells and an early morning dew, and many similar images). The refrain for the song, which tied all these images together was “All kinds of everything remind me of you.”

The scriptural book, “The Song of Songs”, a collection of love-songs attributed to Solomon, has similar traits. The book has the structure of a collection of poetic love-songs between a man in love and his beloved bride. The man represents God and the bride represents us. The book starts with the woman’s voice, then the man’s, with onlookers “The Daughters of Jerusalem” also being a part of the drama. Both in the Jewish and the Christian tradition this book is understood as dual allegory. It speaks of a relationship

OF SONGS..

of God with me, and of a relationship of God with us. Allegories represent both the individual being in love with God, and God, in his love, having a desire and delight not only for the individual, but also God's people as a body. In the Jewish tradition the people as a body was understood as the chosen race of God's people. For us as Christians we see the people as the bride of Christ, which is the Church.

DO YOU FEEL UNLOVABLE?

Sometimes we may feel that we are "unlovable". Isn't that the stumbling block: that, conscious of our many sins, we feel unlovable? Who could possibly like, let alone love us? If we were remotely confident in God's love for us, that would unlock so much in our hearts that we wouldn't want to sin. We have much help from scripture. The Prodigal Son parable carries a message which is powerful. Jesus' love and compassion in his words in the healing of the Leper, "Of course I want to!" go to the heart of the matter. When we enter the spiritual arena of seeing God as a lover, however, then we start to perceive the "of course I want to" energy in the fullness of God's loving relationship with us. It is both overwhelming and empowering. In the Song of Songs my focus is directed to God's desire and delight for us and on the human desire and delight for God. For each of us the call is to be engulfed with awareness of God's love for me personally and his love for me as part of the body of the Church. I am also called to reciprocate such love.

The image, the allegory, of lover is one of many divine allegories in the scriptures. God is also portrayed as judge, doctor, teacher, as well as mercy, tenderness, light, rock, king,

shepherd, and so on. Of all the images of God and of the relationship between God and humanity, however, none is as powerful or as central as that of love between lover and beloved, leading to a spiritual marriage. While it is essential to hold on to the truth that this is an allegory, it is very necessary to ponder and live the truth which the allegory carries to its full extent if we are to understand and to grow in the intimacy of relationship which God seeks to have with us.

THE "WASFS"

Several of the poems of the Songs contain wasfs. A wasf is a device found in marriage poems of the ancient Middle East and elsewhere, which uses comparisons with the natural world and precious objects to express the beauty of the human body. These comparisons, however, are not between things that would usually be associated with each other. A good example is found in the poem in chapter four of the Songs, e.g.,

"How beautiful you are, my love, how beautiful you are! Your eyes behind your veil are doves; your hair is like a flock of goats frisking down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes as they come up from the washing. Each one with its twin, not one unpaired with another. Your lips are like a scarlet thread and your words enchanting. Your cheeks, behind your veil, are halves of pomegranate. Your neck is the tower of David built as a fortress, hung round with a thousand bucklers, and each the shield of a hero. Your breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies." (Sg 4:1-5)

(This is spoken by the lover to his beloved.

Similar poems, e.g. Sg 5:10-16 are voiced from the female beloved to her male lover.)

Wasf is an Arabic word meaning “description”, and yet it is clearly less able to be used to identify an object than any other poetic device I know. No one in their right mind in our culture would start off, when trying to describe someone’s teeth, with an image of sheep! The leap between the image and the reality is just too great. Wasfs in the Song of Songs all have huge leaps in their comparisons. Instead of helping us to visualise in detail the person whose beauty is praised, this wasf in chapter four seems to say more of the state of mind of the one who sings the song or proclaims the poem. I imagine, then, instead of the song, the lover describing his day thus...

“As I was walking down the track I saw a pair of doves, and, would you believe it, I couldn’t stop thinking of your eyes” ... and so on. The poet is clearly lovestruck. All objects whether God-created or human-crafted remind the lover of the beloved. The wider the chasm seems to exist between the object and subject of the wasf, the deeper we sense the immersion in love of the lover for the beloved.

ST BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

“Only the Singer, and the One Sung to, Can Hear it”

So many saints have written reflections and commentaries on the Song of Songs, but for me a key author is St Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153) who wrote eighty-six sermons on it. Towards the end of his first sermon he sets the scene to help us to get the most out of these poems. He advises his listeners regarding the Song of Songs to be aware that this book is inspired by the Spirit, and also that personal experience is needed to unfold its meaning. He declares that the Songs’ harmony is not a harmony of voices, but of wills. He counsels that it is not a song of the streets and crowds; in fact, he says, only the singer and the one who is sung to can hear it - the lover and the beloved.

What Bernard wants us to avoid absolutely is seeing ourselves as bystanders. If we do this we miss the point of the book. As we

are uplifted by the sacred poetry of this book time and time again we see ourselves in its stories, which tell of our relationship with God. We do this by becoming the one who sings and the one who is sung to. It is a drama, an adventure, an unfolding of awareness, and a pilgrimage leading towards spiritual marriage. We are those who, with intensity, listen to and sing to our lover the songs of the will, the emotions and the heart. God is our lover, we are the beloved.

(Some of the material in this article is taken from more lengthy reflection in the CTS booklet “Desire and Delight ... Intimacy with God through the Scriptures” CTS 2013, written by the author)

All objects whether
God-created or
human-crafted
remind the lover
of the beloved.

*'San Bernardo' by Juan Correa de Vivar
(Museo del Prado)*



CHRIST: THE ONE MOST

Fr Andrew Allman, Vice Rector



'Christ Carrying the Cross' by El Greco (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

"Christ on earth was a Man in love. His love gave life to all loves. He was Love itself. He infused life with all the grace of its outward and inward joyfulness, with all its poetry and song, with all the gaiety and laughter and grace."¹ So wrote the English mystic and author Caryl Houselander (1901-1954). A best-selling spiritual writer who drew compliments from such esteemed thinkers as Bernard Longergan and Ronald Knox, Houselander was also an artist. As such, she understood the importance of beauty in our lives.

For Houselander, Christ gives the world its beauty, grace and joy. But He was also "a Man in love" during His earthly life. In love,

because – more than anyone else who has ever lived – He appreciated the beauty of the world:

*"Christ was of all men the most perfect, because He was more sensitive, more aware, more in love with the world's loveliness than others. He saw the beauty about Him with sharper vision, He valued life more. Again, the world was not only something to make Him catch His breath with wonder and love, it was His own, it had for Him the added preciousness of being something He had made."*²

She wrote these words in London in 1941,

¹ Caryl Houselander, *The Reed of God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 63.

² Caryl Houselander, *This War is the Passion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1943), 9.

T SENSITIVE TO BEAUTY

at a time when the city was already deeply scarred by the Second World War. In the midst of destruction, she was still able to perceive and write about beauty, and to see the link between beauty and goodness. Christ was “the most perfect” because He “saw the beauty about Him with sharper vision, He valued life more.” Houselander is suggesting here that an appreciation of beauty is linked to our goodness; it is the path to perfection.

Prayer can help us to appreciate beauty, because it helps us to see as Christ sees. In a section devoted to recovering from the trauma of war, she writes, “Prayer alone can teach us to concentrate again, can lead us to absolute trust in God, and make our minds ready for the other essential things spoken of in the Gospel; for the contemplation (not mere observation) of beauty.”³ In this way, she recommends a path to growth in perfection: through prayer, learn to see with the eyes of Christ; appreciate beauty more; contemplate it, and so become truly good.

Houselander regards the appreciation of beauty particularly as an aspect of childhood. She writes, “The Christ Child in a nation is like the presence of the child in the house: everything centres upon his youth; and he fills everything with his life. If he goes away, the child’s values go, too, such as the sense of wonder, mystery, beauty and adventure: the poetry which, free from materialism, is the most complete realism.”⁴ As a child has a sense of wonder at so much that is new, beautiful, enticing, so we must re-learn to appreciate the beauty of the world with fresh eyes, following the model of the Christ Child.

Houselander also approaches Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross from the perspective of beauty.

She suggests that part of Christ’s sacrifice was the sadness He felt in leaving the world He loved: “Christ closed his eyes upon the lilies of the field and the wild birds and all the world that was bright and lovely and dear to Him as to no other man.”⁵ It was hard for Jesus to close His eyes on the world He loved; it was a sacrifice, but also a choice to fix His gaze totally on His Father; in this way, it was “the most complete adoration”.⁶

Houselander’s work is constantly pointing us to the importance of beauty. It is vital in our pursuit of goodness; it is essential if we are to become more like Jesus. Throughout His earthly life, as the young Christ Child right through to His death on the cross, Christ appreciated beauty, loved the world, and taught us this as a path to perfection.



Caryll Houselander, Cluny Media

³ *This War*, 58-59.

⁴ *Reed*, 75.

⁵ *This War*, 9.

⁶ *This War*, 104.

THE BEAUTY OF CONSECRATION

TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IN THE LIFE OF A PRIEST

Owen Dugan is a fourth year seminarian for the Diocese of Portsmouth

Reflecting on the theme of beauty for this year's Oscotian, it would go amiss not to speak of the most beautiful of all creatures, She who is "more beautiful than beauty [itself]" (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854); the Blessed Virgin Mary and Her role in the life of the priest. Mary is the Mother of the Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, and therefore, in a special way, all priests can be considered sons of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for which She has been invoked over the centuries under the title 'Mother of Priests'. This is true by virtue of the sacramental character impressed on the soul at the moment of a man's ordination to the sacred order of priests, since by it he is sacramentally conformed to the image of Christ the High Priest. It is incumbent on each priest, however, to personally foster this filial relationship with the Blessed Mother if he wishes to see the fruits of it in his life and ministry, that his conformity to Christ may be ever more perfect.

Devotion, and then as a natural consequence, consecration, to the Blessed Mother is indispensable in the life of a priest if he is to - not just sacramentally - but personally become a living image of Christ the Eternal Priest in this world. This is for several reasons. Firstly, because it is Mary herself who is the one that forms Jesus Christ the Eternal Priest, not just in Her womb, but throughout the 30 years He dwelt with Her; learning from Her according to his human nature, modelling himself after Her spirit of sacrifice and unbounded charity. She too then, the Christ-former, will form priests too according to the same image, according to the same spirit. Secondly, because the transformation of a lowly man with all his sins and imperfections into an *alter Christus*, in short - his conformation to Christ the

High Priest - is a work principally of grace. And it is Mary Immaculate, the *Mother of Divine Grace*, who by Her participation in the salvific mission of Christ, has acquired with Him all the graces of Redemption which transform the soul into a priestly soul. With Her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, she has been entrusted with the task of dispensing those graces. According to the opinion of the eminent Mariologist, Fr. Emile Neubert, "Mary...obtains these graces even for those who do not pray to Her for them. But it goes without saying that she obtains immensely more for those who invoke Her name." (Fr. E. Neubert, *Mary and the Priestly Ministry*, p.40). Thus, devotion and consecration to Mary in the life of the priest is essential. Thirdly, it is by the maternal presence of Mary in the spiritual life of a priest, his assiduous attention to Her in prayer and meditation, and by studying Her life and virtues, that the priest will in his own life be embellished with those same beautiful virtues of Mary for which the words of the Song of Songs have for centuries been attributed to Her by the Church in the Sacred Liturgy; "*I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley.*" (Song of Songs 2, 1). And again, "*Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come.*" (Song of Songs 2, 10).

There are many parallels to draw between Mary and the priest. Both participate in a particular way in the mystery of Redemption: at Golgotha, Mary uniquely offered the sacrifice of Her Son on the altar of Her Heart in history for all people of all time, the priest offers that same sacrifice now daily on the altar at Mass. Mary mediates divine grace as part of the divine plan for salvation, the priest mediates divine grace through his



sacramental ministry within that same plan. Mary is the most beautiful of all creatures created by God, the priesthood – although not to the same degree – is also one of God's most beautiful creations, since in the words of St. John Vianney, it is "the love of the heart of Jesus."

If the priest then wishes to live his vocation to the maximum, with the greatest success in the realm of glorifying God and the salvation of souls, he must then understand his

fundamental need for Mary. By consecrating himself to Her, the priest abandons his life into the maternal care of Mary Immaculate, to be formed by Her directly both in the realm of nature and grace. In consecration to Mary, the two beautiful realities of the Immaculate Virgin and the Priest converge, they become one, in truth and in love.

Looking Back

A YEAR AT OSCOTT



MAY 2025

- Thursday, 8 Oscott community gathers to watch the announcement of Pope Leo's election
- Sunday 18 Mass to celebrate the installation of Pope Leo XIV
- 20 – 21 Oscotian Society gathering and AGM



JUNE 2025

- 9 – 16 House retreat at St Beuno's
- Wednesday 18 Day Pilgrimage in the footsteps of Blessed Dominic Barberi
- 23 – 24 Group of Oscott seminarians in Rome for the Jubilee
- Tuesday 24 Farewell barbecue for departing seminarians and staff



JULY 2025

- Wednesday 2 Year 4 Acolyte Mass; end of term
- 4 – 6 Diaconate Formation Retreat
- Saturday 5 Priestly ordination of Revd Adam Bamber (Shrewsbury)
- 7 – 11 Birmingham Clergy Retreat
- Saturday 12 Priestly ordination of Revd Joseph Fawcett Wood (Shrewsbury)
- Saturday 19 Priestly ordination of Revd Gerard Bowen (Birmingham)
- 25 – 28 WeBelieve national festival of Catholic life



SEPTEMBER 2025

- Monday 1 Maryvale HIRS becomes part of Oscott Trust
- Wednesday 3 Priestly ordination of Revd Christopher Igwe (Motherwell)
- 6 – 7 National Jubilee event for seminarians
- Sunday 7 Pilgrimage to Harvington Hall
- 19 – 21 House retreat weekend
- Saturday 27 Priestly ordination of Revd Paul Chisnall (Salford)



OCTOBER 2025

Friday 3	Oscott Feast Day
Saturday 11	Diaconate Formation Candidacy Mass
Sunday 26	Nostra Aetate Anniversary celebration at St Chad's

NOVEMBER 2025

Saturday 1	Annual Blessing of Graves
Tuesday 4	Mass for deceased Birmingham Clergy
Friday 21	Diaconate ordination of Tenny Antony (Birmingham)
Friday 28	Diaconate ordination of Jithin Titto (Birmingham)

DECEMBER 2025

Friday 12	STB Proclamation
Sunday 14	Advent Carol Service
16 – 18	Advent Retreat
Saturday 20	Diaconate Ordinations

JANUARY 2026 | Parish Placements in home dioceses

FEBRUARY 2026

Thursday 5	Visit of Cardinal Giorgio Marengo
Friday 13	Archbishop's Annual Visitation
Saturday 21	Knights of the Holy Sepulchre Mass

MARCH 2026

14-15	Lenten Recollection
Saturday 28	Meeting of the JPPII Network at Oscott

APRIL 2026

13 – 17	Northampton Clergy Retreat
Tuesday 28	Subdiaconate of Jaison Lukose (Syro-Malabar Eparchy)



Jubilarians

DIAMOND (1966)

Mgr Patrick Kilgariff
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Fr David Lannon
Diocese of Salford

GOLDEN (1976)

Canon David Bagstaff
Diocese of East Anglia

Canon Michael Brown
Diocese of Nottingham

Fr Aldo Luigi Tapparo
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Fr Peter Cryan
Macclesfield

RUBY (1986)

Fr Peter Smith
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Fr John Danford
Diocese of Northampton

Fr John O'Donnell
Diocese of Nottingham

Canon Niall Mullaley
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Fr Paul Standish
Diocese of Shrewsbury

SILVER (2001)

Fr Paul Edwards
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Canon Jonathan Mitchell
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Newly Ordained Priests

Fr Adam Bamber

Diocese of Shrewsbury | 5 July 2025

Fr Gerard Bowen

Archdiocese of Birmingham | 19 July 2025

Fr Paul Chisnall

Diocese of Salford | 27 September 2025

Fr Joseph Fawcett Wood

Diocese of Shrewsbury | 12 July 2025

Fr Christopher Igwe

Diocese of Motherwell | 3 September 2025

Newly Ordained Permanent Deacons

Revd Mr Emmanuel Chituh

Diocese of Portsmouth | 26 July 2025

Revd Mr Andrew Hunt

Diocese of Nottingham | 12 July 2025

Revd Mr Rafael Krasnodebski

Diocese of Plymouth | 13 July 2025

Revd Mr Richard Martin

Diocese of Portsmouth | 26 July 2025

Revd Mr Paul Milton

Archdiocese of Birmingham | 17 July 2025

Men Studying for the Priesthood

YEAR VI

Revd Mr Tenny Antony
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Revd Mr Chris Colaco
Jesus Youth / Diocese of Northampton

Br Zechariah Heritage
Birmingham Oratory

Revd Mr Peter Ho
Diocese of East Anglia

Revd Mr Kevin Hogan
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Revd Mr Anthony Reilly
Diocese of East Anglia

Revd Mr Jithin Titto
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Alex Wyndham
Diocese of Brentwood

YEAR V

Matthew Hickson
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Jaison Lukose
Syro-Malabar Eparchy

Stephen O'Hara
Diocese of Leeds

Oliver Patton
Diocese of Northampton

Carmine Rea
Diocese of Salford

YEAR IV

Owen Dugan
Diocese of Portsmouth

Michael Furey
Diocese of Nottingham

Br Raphael Knight
Birmingham Orator

Tomás Miller
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Anh Tuan Nguyen
Diocese of Aberdeen

Neil Peixoto
Diocese of Clifton

David Pinder
Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

YEAR II

Conor Jones
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Eamonn Kennedy
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Bohdan Mandziuk
Ukrainian Eparchy

Lukas Mickevičius
Diocese of Nottingham

Michael Nwakamma
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Renver Peña
Diocese of Northampton

YEAR I

Douglas Grantham
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Filip Gronkiewicz
Archdiocese of Birmingham

Br Thomas Kirk
York Oratory

Richard Wilde
Diocese of Shrewsbury

Men Studying for the Permanent Diaconate

YEAR IV

Andrew Cheng

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Alan de Ste Croix

Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia

Martin Dolan

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Michael Flower

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Ben Hawley

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Chris Jones

Diocese of Nottingham

Sunny Joseph

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Thomas Joseph

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Jeremi Kiruparajan

Diocese of Copenhagen

David Kusi-Yeboah

Archdiocese of Birmingham

John Maguire

Diocese of Plymouth

Stephen Myers

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Colin Page

Diocese of Nottingham

Anthony Reed

Diocese of Plymouth

Carlton Rose

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Patrick Standen

Archdiocese of Birmingham

YEAR III

Douglas Bruce

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Nick Cosgriff

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Jim Hordell

Diocese of Portsmouth

Vernon Jones

Diocese of Portsmouth

David Shields

Diocese of Portsmouth

Ben Sloper

Diocese of Plymouth

Lee Summers

Diocese of Nottingham

Jerrin Varghese

Diocese of Portsmouth

YEAR II

Samuel Carroll

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Arnaldo Dela Cruz

Diocese of Portsmouth

Christopher Gill

Diocese of Shrewsbury

Mario Juruena

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Tom Mellon

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Noble George

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Damian Norton

Diocese of Nottingham

Felix Obadaki

Diocese of Portsmouth

Mark Rodgers

Diocese of Plymouth

Winner Varghese

Archdiocese of Birmingham

YEAR I

Sam Ewell

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Mano Joseph

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Peter Malins

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Jeens Parasseril

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Godfrey Labrosse

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Max Mainini

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Benedict Chadzutsa

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Russell Dempsey

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Keith Billson

Diocese of Nottingham

Daineal OhEarchai

Diocese of Portsmouth

Roy Mark Singh

Diocese of Portsmouth

Mr Artur Per

Diocese of Lancaster

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Fr Andrew Allman	BA, MA, STL	Vice Rector, Formation Tutor

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Fr Justin Karakadu SDV	MA	Formation Tutor Spirituality, Homiletics
Fr Andrew Richardson	Meng, BA, STB	Pastoral Director, Formation Tutor
Pete Smallwood	MBACP (Acc), Dip Couns	Human Formation Coordinator
Canon Rob Taylerson	BSc, PGCE, STL	Spiritual Director

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Revd Dr Francis John Selman	MA, MagTheol, PhL, PhD	Metaphysics, Trinity
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EXTERNAL SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Revd Dr Gerard Sheehan	MA, STD
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Joca Rogerson		Human Formation Tutor

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Dr Christopher Wojtulewicz	BA, PGCE (Higher Ed), PhD	Dean of Philosophy
Dr Sarah Boss	BA, STB, STL, PhD	Mariology
Dr Angela Costley	BA, MSt, PGCE, PhD, SSB, SSL	Scripture, Biblical Greek

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Sue Perkins	Academic Office Administrator

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Philomena Mullins	BA (Hons), MA, PGCE

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Canon Raymond Corbett	<i>STB, JCL, PGCE</i>	Canon Law
Revd Dr Michael Cullinan	<i>MA, PhD, STD</i>	Moral Theology
Fr David Doran	<i>BA, BSc, MA, STB, PhL</i>	Philosophy
Revd Dr Anthony Dykes	<i>BA, MA, PhD</i>	Latin
Fr Maro Egawhary	<i>STB, SSL</i>	New Testament
Canon Paul Fitzpatrick	<i>MA, STL</i>	New Testament
Monsignor John Hadley	<i>MA, BSc, PhL, STL, JCL</i>	Philosophy
Professor David Jones	<i>MA, MA, MSt, DPhil, FHEA</i>	Bioethics
Revd Dr Van Nguyen	<i>BA, STB, STL, STD</i>	Patristics
Revd Dr Guy Nicholls C.O.	<i>MA, STL, DPhil</i>	Liturgy, Eucharist
Dr Jordan Pullicino	<i>BA (Hons), STB, MA, PhD</i>	Pastoral Theology, Missiology
Fr Ryan Service	<i>BA, STB, STL</i>	Catholic Social Teaching
Fr Daniel Seward C.O.	<i>BA, MA</i>	Church History
Eleanora Stefanyan	<i>MA, STM, STL</i>	Sacrament of Marriage
Revd Dr Ralph Weimann	<i>DD, PhD</i>	Sexual Morality
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Naomi Johnson	<i>BSc, MSc</i>	Curator
Paul Meller	<i>BSc, MSc, MA</i>	Librarian
Deborah Morris		House Administrator
Rachael Rea	<i>BA (Hons)</i>	Rector's PA, Events
Tony Sutera		Cemetery Administrator
James Wigley	<i>BSc</i>	ICT Manager

REMEMBERING PROFESSOR JUDITH FRANK



Professor Judith Champ, celebrated Catholic historian, long-time history lecturer at Oscott, former Director of Studies, Dame of the Holy Sepulchre, died on Easter Sunday, 5th April 2026. She was 72 years old. Her Requiem Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, with Archbishop Bernard and the Birmingham auxiliary bishops concelebrating, along with two abbots and over 100 priests. A large congregation, made up of Judith's family, former colleagues and many friends, participated in the Mass. She was then laid to rest in Oscott cemetery. As a tribute, we reproduce here the text of the homily preached at her Requiem by Fr Simon Baker.

NANCES CHAMP

‘AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING,
IS NOW AND EVER SHALL BE’

Early one morning, in my final year at Oscott College, I sent an email to Judith. Attached to the email – or so I thought – was the final draft of my STB dissertation. After Morning Prayer, Judith stopped me in the cloister and said, “I’ll take a look at it this morning: come and see me after lunch.”

After lunch, I went to her office and took my usual place on the settee. From behind the computer monitor I heard Judith say, “your word count is the same – still short: in fact, the only difference I can see, is the picture you have added to the second page.” I nodded and smiled mischievously. Rising from her desk, Judith started to laugh and say, “I know a picture paints a thousand words, but that’s not going to be accepted in this particular context, case or setting!”

As I look around the Cathedral today, I can’t help but think that Judith herself would be saying that phrase, “a picture paints a thousand words” once more. The scarlet of the Cardinal, the peaks of the mitres, the varying shades of purple in the concelebrants, and the sea of mournful black attire. All are gathered here in this familiar place. All are from different walks of life, but many whose paths have never actually ever crossed, but nonetheless, today, are united in a sole purpose and solemn duty, as we gather in the tenderness of this Requiem Mass: a time and moment, holding together grief and hope, memory and promise.

In our First Reading we heard Job lamenting,

‘O that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book!’ This is not a lamentation or regret for Judith. As we know, over the years, many of her words have been written down and published.

Pope Francis referred to the importance of history, insisting that our historical roots are, and I quote, ‘not anchors chaining us to past times and preventing us from facing the present and creating something new. Instead, they are a fixed point from which we can grow and meet new challenges.’

In – what became her last personal publication, ‘St Mary’s College, Oscott: a historical guide’ – Judith began by quoting those words of Pope Francis and, in the preface of the book, made reference to her own journey saying: ‘since the late 1970s, I have researched and written on aspects of the College’s history, and I have taught courses on the history of the Church as part of the seminary programme from 1981 until 2021.’

Judith goes on to say, ‘I am now aware of becoming part of the College’s history myself, as the first woman to be appointed to the formation staff, in 1998, and to be awarded a personal professorship in 2017.’

As we all know, and as Judith herself admitted, her life was shaped by history – not as a mere study of the past, but as a living conversation between what has been, what is, and what may yet be. A Catholic historian understands something essential: that the past is not dead. It breathes through tradition, through memory, through the Church herself, and

most importantly, it forms us in this present moment.

Our Gospel places us at the empty tomb as the women arrive. A few weeks aearly hours of Easter morning, when the sun began to rise and the dawn chorus was beginning to sound, as I prayed the Prayers of the Dead with and for Judith, the words of the 'Glory Be': 'as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be' seemed unusually poignant and fitting. They are familiar, even simple – but today they carry a profound weight. In a particular way, those words speak of the life of Judith we return lovingly to God, and for whom this Requiem Mass is offered.

“AS IT WAS...”

Judith knew that phrase well; not just liturgically, but intellectually and spiritually. She understood the Church as something received – not invented. A gift handed down through centuries of struggle, sanctity, failure, reform and grace. Judith studied the lives of those who came before: saints, scholars, pastors, sinners redeemed: and in doing so, she listened; for to study history demands humility; for humility readily acknowledges that truth did not begin with us.

“IS NOW...”

Judith did not remain in the past. Her work – especially in the formation of priests – was deeply rooted in the present, for she knew that history is not a museum; it is a teacher. Over the years, she helped shape those who would stand at altars, hear confessions, preach the Gospel – not in some idealised past, but in the complexity of the contemporary world. She understood that the Church must speak now, must live now, and therefore, must serve now.

Judith believed that a priest who knows where he comes from will better understand where he stands – and therefore, how to lead. Her study, knowledge and scholarship was not detached: it was pastoral and it was formative. It was, in the truest sense, an act of service to the living Church.

“AND EVER SHALL BE...”

Christian hope awaits the dawn. For all Judith's study of the past and engagement with the present, her vision was never confined to earthly time. She believed in a future – not just in the chronological sense of time, but in the eternal. Judith formed priests, not merely for the Church of today, but for the Church that will endure. The Church that moves forward, generation by generation, is carried forward into eternity by grace and now, we entrust her to that future fully revealed.

The historian who traced the unfolding of God's work across centuries now stands before the Lord of history Himself. The one who studied the communion of saints now enters it fully. The one who helped prepare others for priesthood now meets the eternal High Priest.

I cannot let today go by without referring to the Dream of Gerontius, a text which Judith knew well, had sung on many occasions and enjoyed hearing performed when possible. I recall the words of the Angel: “softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul, in my most loving arms I now enfold thee, and, o'er the penal waters, as they roll, I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee.”

There is something deeply consoling in this image. After a life spent studying the long journey of human striving, the soul is not cast adrift into the unknown. It is received, carried and known.

A historian knows that every age is marked by both darkness and light. They know how often humanity repeats its errors – but also how grace breaks in, again and again, often quietly, often unexpectedly. Perhaps this is why Judith approached and used history not with cynicism, but with hope; for, to study history honestly, is to see that God never abandons His people.

Judith, having spent a lifetime tracing those signs in the past, now steps into the fullness of that mystery.

The Angel's farewell continues: “and thou shalt see thy Lord, and thou shalt know His love.” This is the fulfilment toward which

every life moves, whether consciously or not. But for one who has spent years searching for meaning across centuries, there is a certain poetic completion here. The questions that history raises about justice, suffering, purpose, are destined, to find their answer not in a theory, but in a Person.

In Christ, all time is gathered. The past is redeemed, the present is sanctified, and the future is opened into eternity.

Today we commend this historian of faith to God with both sorrow and gratitude. Sorrow, because we feel the loss of a mind and heart that helped us see more clearly. Gratitude, because her work and her life, remind us that we are not lost in time.

Perhaps the greatest lesson that Judith taught us is this: do not fear the future. Learn from the past, yes – but move forward with hope. This is because the same God in every age is always present, guiding, redeeming, and calling each of us homeward.

“Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul,” the Angel says. And so, we entrust Judith to that journey into completeness, not into oblivion but into the eternal word.

I began by recalling my meeting with Judith over the word shortage in my dissertation. On the Wednesday before she died, I spoke with her about her funeral. She was clear, when asked who she would like the celebrant to be. Then, I asked her the next question: “who is to preach?” and jokingly added, “or who do you want to get revenge on after all these years?” There was a pause but after a few moments, what had been an almost lifeless body raised an arm and placed her hand on mine. “You!” she said. “You can preach – it will be a good combination of Vincent and you.”

Throughout this homily, I hope to have made up for the missing word count of years ago. I can’t help but wonder if, like any good supervisor, lecturer and teacher, Judith was simply making sure that everything was completed to the best of the student’s ability, today’s offering included.

“AS IT WAS, IS NOW, AND EVER SHALL BE...”

In the eternal day, those words of doxology are a promise for God to fulfil. What was good, true, and faithful in Judith’s life and faith is not lost. It is all gathered into God. What she gave – her teaching, her influence, her formation of others – continues into eternal life. The love and friendship which Judith expressed and gave to her family and to so many friends continues to live on in the legacy which she leaves.

In the final chapter of her biography of Bishop William Ullathorne, Judith wrote of that great man what could easily be said of her, ‘a prolific speaker and writer, often outspoken where believed necessary and determined to use support of pastoral vision.’

In the funeral oration, given by John Cuthbert Hedley in this very Cathedral in the late nineteenth century, the congregation heard words referring to Ullathorne. Mindful of Judith’s great passion for Ullathorne, it seems fitting that what was said of him, could easily be applied to her: ‘she was never small, nor mean, nor selfish. Those who came into contact with her felt that they had met a real woman, rooted and founded in unmistakable solid earth – a woman who might rebuff you, but would never pass you false coin ... Whatever monument we build to her memory, her soul lives on for ever, and her name will be cherished by his children’s children for many a generation yet to come.’

So, we grieve – but not as those without hope. We give thanks – for a mind that sought truth, for a faith that served the Church, for a life that bridged past and future. We pray – for mercy, for rest, for the joy of the Kingdom for Judith.

And so, today we pray. Eternal rest, grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

‘AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW AND EVER SHALL BE’



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