

# The White-Robed Army of Martyrs

In the religious community to which I belong, we take turns organising the music in chapel. This week, it was my job, and the difficulty of finding suitable hymns for several feasts of martyrs made me question: what are we doing when we celebrate our older brothers and sisters in the faith in this way?

Many would argue that martyrdom is an obsolete irrelevance: belonging, if anywhere, in stained glass windows and plaster statues, and at worst dreadfully subversive of human flourishing. We use the word to betoken emotional blackmail: behind this lie hints of a dark complicity with victimhood which psychologists have named the martyr complex, providing validation for emotional violence against the despised and hated self. And nor can we forget the use made of the rhetoric of martyrdom to provide a veneer of legitimation, for physical violence against the despised and hated other. When, in the summer of 2016, Fr Jacques Hamel was brutally murdered, as he celebrated Mass in rural Normandy, some of the most chilling responses were those that evoked just such a conscription of martyrdom: a young woman, for instance, stating on Facebook, without any apparent sense of irony, that the Catholics of Europe should embark upon a new crusade, precisely because, in the face of this modern martyrdom, they should refuse to be “lambs led to the slaughter”.

The derivation of *martyr* from the Greek word for a witness is well-known. But the simple implications of this etymology are often overlooked, with distorting consequences. We think of the martyrs as those who do a particular kind of thing, as a particular kind of thing is done to them: The martyrs are those who hold firm to Christ – this is what they do - to the point of shedding their blood – this is what is done to them. Witnesses, however, are those who see, before they do or suffer anything on account of their vision. It is their seeing that energises their doing and sustains them in their suffering. Martyrs in the Christian sense must witness Christ before they witness to Christ. But when we look at Jesus, supremely when we look at him on the cross his martyrs share and emulate, we do not see any self-indulgent courting of despair, or any unhealthy exaltation of pain. Jesus prays to be spared the Cross, not embracing it for its own sake, but enduring it for the joy that is set before him in the resurrection into which he precedes us.

And, while Christians have frequently spoken of the Cross using military imagery – sing my tongue, the last great battle, as the old hymn has it - this is less to scaffold than to destabilise our conventional notions of the relationship between might and right; not a matter of recruiting Christ to our warlike causes, but of our enlisting in his campaign of peace. Jesus goes to Calvary out of love, willing the salvation, not the extermination of his enemies, and it as a victim that the world’s redeemer wins the day. It is this that the martyrs see in their crucified and risen Lord; it is for this reason they hold firm to him, trusting he will hold them firm in what they undergo for his sake. And it is for this reason, too, that we celebrate their example and ask for their prayers.

*Sr Ann*



## FISHER HOUSE NEWSLETTER

Sunday 9 February - 5th SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

### CALENDAR - LENT TERM WEEK IV

Sunday 9	5TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR		
	9.00am	Sung Latin Mass	
	11.00 am	Sung English Mass	
Monday 10	1.05pm	Mass	<i>St Scholastica</i>
Tuesday 11	1.05pm	Mass	<i>Our Lady of Lourdes</i>
Wednesday 12	1.05pm	Mass	
Thursday 13	12.30 - 1.00pm	Adoration	
	1.05pm	Mass	
Friday 14	1.05pm	Mass	<i>St Cyril &amp; St Methodius</i>
	7.30pm	Vespers and Meditation	
Saturday 15	1.05pm	Mass	
	4.30 - 5.30	Confessions	
	6.00pm	Vigil Mass of Sunday	
Sunday 16	6TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR		
	9.00am	Latin Mass	
	11.00 am	Sung English Mass	

FR MARK LANGHAM - SR ANN SWAILES OP - FR CHASE PEPPER CSC

## COLLEGE MASSES

Mass will be celebrated by Fr Mark at Pembroke College at 6.00pm on Monday, and at Homerton College on Wednesday at 6.15pm. All are welcome.

## ALL-NIGHT ADORATION



There will be all-night adoration on Friday 21-Saturday 22 February. Please see the poster outside the chapel, to sign up for half-hour slots. If you are a musician, please contact Sofia (sc2156) to offer your talents!

## FISHER FRIENDS

Senior members of Fisher House will visit Palazzola, the idyllic lakeside retreat of the English College in Rome, in August. Details of this year's excursion are on the notice board, or email Fr Mark on ml709.

## FROM CAMBRIDGE TO THE CROSS

Catholic institutions in Cambridge are collaborating during Lent on our devotional journey. Our contribution will be on Friday 6 March, with our traditional *Stations of the Cross*. We are looking for poems, meditations, music that you have written. A sign-up list will appear in the next few weeks.

## FISHER COMMITTEE



The Fisher AGM, with election of the new committee will take place next Sunday, 16 February, following 11.00am Mass. At this meeting we shall elect members of the new committee (we shall first vote on a constitutional proposal to limit the committee to 12 members), and elect the new chair. The list of candidates is posted outside the chapel.

## COULD YOU MAKE THE STONES SPEAK?

Once again, ARC UK is offering a wonderful opportunity to work as an English-speaking guide in Cathedrals around Europe. Training is provided by ARC: passion and enthusiasm for history and story-telling are more important. Volunteers live and work within a Christian community. Please see the flyer outside the chapel, or visit [www.encounterarc.org.uk](http://www.encounterarc.org.uk) for more information. Closing date: Sunday 15th March 2020.

## FAITH IN POLITICS

Catholic parliamentary internships are available - this great opportunity is sponsored by the Catholic bishops. See the poster for details. Closing date 28 Feb.

## APOLOGIA

Our popular series of talks on Catholic theology and culture returns on Tuesday, with a meal at 7.00pm, and at 8.00pm a talk given by Dr Andrew Paverd on 'Faith and the Machines'. All are welcome.

## BENSON CLUB



The book for this term is classic Spanish novel *The House of Ulloa* by Emilia Pardo Bazan. (*It's fantastic - Fr Mark*). We will meet to discuss it on Thursday 12 March.

## DANTE CIRCLE

The *Circolo* meets at 5.30pm in the Great Chamber next Monday, to discuss Purgatorio IV. Texts provided.

## PRO-LIFE GROUP

The group meets on Monday at 7.30pm in the Fisher Room, when Ryan Christopher will speak on *Free Speech and Life Issues*.

## LAST WEEK'S COLLECTION

£403.96

It costs £4,000 per week to run Fisher House.

Contactless donation of £4 available after 11.00am Mass

## NEWMAN LECTURE SERIES



The next lecture in our series to mark the canonization of Cardinal Newman is on Thursday 13 February at 7.30pm, when Mgr Roderick Strange will speak on *Newman and Holiness*. Mgr Strange is one of our foremost Newman scholars, who has written celebrated biographies of the Cardinal and is currently editing his letters for publication. His latest book *Newman: The Heart of Holiness*, will be on sale.

## SR ANN

will be preaching at Evensong at Clare College next Sunday at 6.00pm.

## SCRIPTURAL REASONING

An opportunity to share scriptures with Muslim brethren, to build bonds of love and knowledge. Great Chamber 7.30pm Thursday 13 February.

## PALMS

As we prepare for Lent, please bring in your old palm branches, to be burned for Ash Wednesday.