

# The Parish of Christchurch

The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch  
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell



for Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Dear Friends,

In Britain, November is about Guy Fawkes night fireworks and bonfires, followed a few days later by Remembrance Sunday. In the United States, however, the great annual November event is Thanksgiving Day, celebrated on the fourth Thursday of the month. Thanksgiving is a national holiday, with traditional food and customs: the President even pardons one of two turkeys (the fate of the unpardoned bird is predictable!).

Thanksgiving Day 2020 falls on November 26<sup>th</sup>, the same day as in 1789, when George Washington gave the first proclamation of Thanksgiving, at the request of both Houses of Congress. That proclamation began:

“Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me ‘to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, ...”

I mention this not to encourage you to eat turkey twice within a calendar month (let alone pumpkin pie, which I will need great persuasion ever to try again); rather, it’s the idea of setting aside “a day of thanksgiving and prayer” that is so striking, and also resonates with one of the major recurring themes of the Bible. Some well-known verses come to mind:

“O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us **come into his presence with thanksgiving**” . *Psalm 95.1-2*

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” . *1 Thessalonians 5.16-18*

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through him.**” *Colossians 3:17*

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” *Philippians 4.6-7*

One could go on. Have you ever considered, however, why thanking God is so important? It has to be more than just good manners. Nor are we to give thanks to God because he needs it (though I’m sure it pleases him when we thank him for his many gifts and graces to us), but because of the effect that thanking God has on us. Meister Eckhart, a noted 14<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian and philosopher, once said that “if the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you’, that would suffice.”

This November, however, the impulse to be thankful may well feel weaker than usual, for understandable reasons. For the past eight months our lives have been severely impacted and, in many ways, diminished because of Covid-19. As I write, the latest UK daily death toll from the virus is 595 – each one an individual loved and cherished; yesterday the daily infection rate was over 33,000. Unemployment is rising, and more jobs will be lost; foodbanks are working flat out; and though this week’s announcement of a potentially viable vaccine has encouraged many, its introduction is still some time off.

In these circumstances, unprecedented in our lifetimes, the second of those Bible verses is the one we may all struggle with: when Paul wrote that we should “give thanks in all circumstances”, is that meant to include a global pandemic? The key is in realising that we’re not asked to give thanks for all circumstances, but that

we can thank God in all circumstances; though – as with so many aspects of these days – the theory is fine, it's just doing it with conviction that doesn't come easily.

Reflecting on this, I was reminded of the famous words spoken by the father of an unwell boy who, in response to Jesus' saying that "All things can be done for the one who believes", cries out urgently and from the heart, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." As we approach Thanksgiving 2020, we might want to adapt that, and say to God, "Lord, I am thankful; help my un-thankfulness." So, between now and Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>, it may help to write down your own personal list of what God has given you and done for you, for your family and for those you love; and then use it in prayer to thank him.

In the spirit of Philippians 4, our thanksgiving can sit alongside the prayers of our hearts, our own cries for help for those we love, for ourselves, for the nation, etc.. In addition to helping us remember and acknowledge all that God has done for us, praying this way can help restore our perspective on life, If we can develop an "attitude of gratitude", we may discover, personally and communally – even in these dark days – that "the peace of God, which passes all understanding," can indeed keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. God bless you and those you love and care for, this week and always,

Charles Stewart

\* \* \* \* \*

*A message from the Outreach Committee, about lockdown activities:*

We have two projects just beginning and would love your help to build some momentum.

One is making 'Twiddle Mitts', which are knitted mitts with bits and pieces sewn onto them for people to hold and manipulate - these can really help some people living with dementia, or who suffer anxiety or restlessness, to feel calm. Instructions and more details are on the parish website under 'Community'. If you cannot access the website, please contact Fr. Jonathan for more details. The intention is to donate these to the hospital and other groups who use them.

The other is lockdown recipe sharing. The idea here is to post on the website short video demonstrations of very simple recipes that people can follow at home. The idea here is simply to add to community cohesion by sharing recipes. You can either make the video yourself (please keep your face out of it if you can!) and email it to [community@christchurchpriory.org](mailto:community@christchurchpriory.org), or send the recipe to the same email address, or to Fr Jonathan, and we will have a go at making the video for you. In time, we may invite people from the wider community to share their recipe ideas. Have a look at the two examples that are already on the website (under 'Community'). Many thanks.

\* \* \* \* \*

This is your last opportunity to contribute to the 'thank you' gifts to David Hewitt, and the outgoing wardens James Morton and Roger Haxby. All donations should please be in by Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, using one of the following methods:

- **Donation by bank transfer**, please use: Account Name - P.C.C. of Christchurch No.2 Account; Sort Code 52-21-34; Account Number 52428001.
- Please use "Wardens" as reference for James Morton & Roger Haxby; and "Parochial Reader" for David Hewitt. Please email Ian Penny on [prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org](mailto:prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org), when you have sent the donation.
- **Donation by cheque**: please make cheques payable to P.C.C of Christchurch No.2. Account and mark for Ian's attention. If posted, to Priory House, Quay Road, BH23 1BU.
- Whether by post or by hand, please put a note in the envelope clearly marked with "Warden" or "Parochial Reader". If you are donating to both, please use two separate cheques; the note in the envelope should reflect which cheque is for which presentation. Thank you.
- **Donation by cash**: please put in an envelope for Ian's attention and bring it to the Priory, clearly marked as above.