

August – September 2018

The Rector writes:

'THE LATTER YEARS'

Watching the World Cup football over the last few weeks has been exciting hasn't it – especially with England doing so well! Apart from the football, I have been fascinated by a couple of things, Firstly the wonderful crowds of people turning out to support their teams; and secondly the wisdom of some of the pundits who were heroes of mine in an earlier generation but who have, like me grown older yet still contribute much to the game they love.

Seeing such huge crowds at football matches in July put me in mind of the biggest football ground crowd I could remember in July, when 31,000 people gathered at Villa Park in Birmingham in 1984.

This was not to watch a football match, but to listen to Billy Graham at the 'Mission England' rally. The evangelist preached at six football grounds across the nation during that summer, including Anfield (Liverpool), Roker Park (Sunderland), Carrow Road (Norwich), Portman Road (Ipswich) and Ashton Gate (Bristol) – sharing the good news of Jesus to packed stadia on each occasion.

Billy Graham died earlier this year (Feb 2018) at the grand old age of 99, having conducted over 400 Christian crusades around the world. He left behind many famous quotes including this one as he neared his 70th birthday:

'Old age may have its limitations and challenges, but in spite of them our latter years can be some of the most rewarding and fulfilling of our lives'

This was certainly true of St Martin who, you will remember we left last month, returned to the monastery at Marmoutier, just outside Tours, to live out a life of quiet contemplation and simplicity. Here Martin spent a great deal of time in prayer and one particular focus of his prayers was on the pastoral ministry of the church. The final sixteen years of Martin's life were to prove some of the most fruitful. When Martin first became Bishop there was no parochial system. Whenever a congregation began to form, in city, town or large village, a bishop would be chosen as its pastor, assisted by



a deacon. As the congregation grew the bishop would ordain a presbyter, elected from the congregation – often a businessman or community leader. The presbyter would assist the bishop when he visited for the Eucharist (in some places perhaps only once or twice a year), help with pastoral issues, cover for the bishop during his absence, and in larger congregations set up a consultative council. But all the authority and power for decision making was for the bishop alone.

As the number of converts to Christianity increased it became almost impossible to continue this hierarchical ministry, so Martin trained and ordained several of the monks at Marmoutier and sent them out to towns that were too far from Tours for him to visit regularly. Their duties were to do the work of the bishop in those communities, including the ordination of local pastors where new congregations were formed. Martin carried out a visitation to each area when he could to authorise and affirm the work that was going on. So Martin began the model of parish ministry which is still largely the way the Church of England is using today!

By now Martin was an old man, each year he would travel round his churches in Advent and celebrate Christmas and Epiphany on his travels. He would spend the winter at Tours and keep a solemn Lent, before celebrating baptisms and ordinations at Easter. In Summer he would attend court, and carry out further parochial visits before returning in September to his cell for an extended period of prayer and contemplation. Martin died at Candés, where he had gone to settle a quarrel in the church, on 11th November 397 – he was 90 years old.

Your rector is also entering his latter years, in active stipendiary ministry at least, and has been charged with the task of pastoral reorganisation in Chelsfield. With the recent departure of the vicar of St Mary, Green Street Green I have been asked to explore how we might establish more effective ministry with St Mary's, All Souls (Pratt's Bottom) and St Martin's working together in partnership.

Exciting, and hopefully rewarding times lie ahead, and I shall write more in the autumn when plans are clearer – but for now prayer and contemplation, following the example of our patron saint, are the order of the day.

Yours in Christ
Reverend John, your Rector.