

Community Routes

Preaching for the Preachers

In Cambridge in April, Desmond Alban attended the third quinquennial International Congress on Preaching, sponsored by Preaching magazine (published in Nashville, TN) and the Premier Media Group. With a predominance of American protestant theology, and accents to match, it felt at times as if he might need his passport to get home again but the conference was stimulating, challenging, inspiring and certainly bumper packed (the equivalent of 10 major evangelical sermons a day!). Each speaker showed himself (it nearly always was him) to be an outstanding proponent of the preacher's art, boundaries were not as narrowly drawn as might be feared, and the emphasis was largely on a positive message - although 'fundamentalist Pharisees', 'prosperity gospel Sadducees', (party) political preaching and a (misrepresented) Catholic Eucharistic theology all received passing flack! Durham's Bishop Tom Wright was a real highlight with his superb unpacking of St Paul's message at the Areopagus (the overall theme being idolatry), as were Alister McGrath countering the Idol of Science, and English Baptist Steve Chalke encouraging engagement with social need - and proving that his published controversial questioning of the doctrine of penal substitution didn't disqualify him! Desmond Alban's habit was, unsurprisingly, the only one to be seen, but he struck up a friendship with a mufti-clad Jesuit (as is usual for them) who was another perhaps-surprising attendee - and as so often, there were the conversations with those who knew us Franciscans, both in the UK and the USA. He returned with much food for thought.

Holy Week and Easter Travellers

Moscow

Colin Wilfred writes:

2007 is one of those years in which the eastern and western dates for Easter coincide and this provided an incredibly rich background to the services and liturgies I was able to take part in and preach at.

In case you think that Anglicans are a recent arrival on the Moscow scene, actually there have been Anglican chaplains in the city since the sixteenth century. The present chaplain, Dr Simon Stephens, ministers to a large congregation of diplomats, business people, students and others, together with their spouses and children: people drawn from all over the world, many working and living in stressful conditions, in a city of 15 million people with its own extraordinary history and life.

I was joined by three students from St Stephen's House, who are training for ordination, and together we were responsible for a prayer breakfast at 7 a.m., a midday concert with a devotional address, evening services and a Christian mystery play. Bishop Geoffrey Rowell of the Diocese of Europe came for the liturgies from Maundy Thursday to Easter Day. In between the worship, prayer and reflection, there were meals to share with generous parishioners, pastoral conversations and spiritual direction.

After celebrating our Easter Vigil, as Bishop Rowell, Canon Stephens and I had been invited by the Patriarch of Moscow to the Russian Orthodox Easter Liturgy, we went to the newly rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which holds over 7,000 worshippers. The Vigil needed a certain amount of liturgical stamina and included four hours of standing! Vladimir Putin only managed one hour, so after he went we were invited to stand by the iconostasis with the government ministers.

Inevitably, I reflected on the astonishing reversal of fortune for the Russian Orthodox Church, which having survived 70 years of one of the most savage persecutions of Christian history, now has the awesome task of bringing and living the gospel in a vast country with immense social and political changes.

For me the most extraordinary (and moving) moment was when I spotted Patriarch Alexi (who is elderly and in poor health) running up the steps into the sanctuary - why? Then I realised that the choir were singing, 'Run and tell the world the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'.

Morocco

Bart writes:

John and I spent Eastertide in Morocco, keeping company with a small fraternity of OFM friars in Marrakesh, who plied us with travel tips and introduced us to the Little Brothers of Jesus who live in the medina in the old city. After an excursion along the Draa river valley and then atop camels to the edge of the Sahara, we stayed with a community at Tazert in the foothills of the Atlas mountains. These were Poor Clares who had gone over to the Melchite (Byzantine Catholic) rite in 1962 to gain more affinity with the Arab and Berber world. Vigils lasted two hours, of Arabic chant interspersed with French. The priest was a Lebanese monk who, having injured an ankle, performed the liturgy in a wheelchair as if it were a chariot. He introduced us to the poetry of Jallaludin Rumi.

In the coastal resort of Essaouira we met the local Catholic priest who disliked the sea, and took us instead to his smallholding where he had built a hermitage in which to retire. We were impressed by the tremendous hospitality and deep faith of the Moroccans, as well as disturbed by the poverty in which they mostly live. What a world!

A Korean Retreat

Nicholas Alan writes:

In November of 2006 I flew out to Korea for a four month stay in the country where I had once worked for the Church Mission Society. Part of the time I spent with the Korean Franciscan Brotherhood at their friary in the north-east of the country, towards the border with North Korea. For all the news that the West hears about nuclear stand-offs, people in Korea just get on with their lives, hoping and praying for peaceful reunification of the country and lamenting their division since the end of the Second World War. The Korean Franciscan brothers Stephen and Lawrence, together with Christopher John from New Zealand, provide hospitality to visitors and retreatants, working also as managers for the Seoul diocesan retreat house next door. The area is

beautiful countryside with mountains all around and the nearest town acting as a ski-resort in the winter. The Korean Anglican Church is very proud of this fledging community for men - the first in the church - building on the faithful witness and service of Korean Anglican women's communities since 1925.

Then as the first snows of winter descended, I headed south to spend a 3 month retreat at a Korean Zen Buddhist monastery. I had visited the place briefly before, but this was my first opportunity to take part in one of the twice yearly retreat seasons. An international community had gathered, with a schedule of chanting, silent meditation and some manual work from 3 o'clock each morning to 9 o'clock at night. Being woken by scriptures chanted outside in the freezing pre-dawn air by the resident novices made me realise how relatively easy life had been as a novice in the SSF! Having few conversations and no news or communication with the outside world for all the time in retreat made everything seem so noisy and hectic on my return to the city afterwards. I now appreciate all the more the love of Francis for the silence of the mountain hermitages of Umbria. But it was good also to return to my Franciscan brothers, to hear news from home, and to relax again into the familiar phrases of the psalms and the liturgy of the church.

Round up

In April, Samuel was re-elected as Minister Provincial of the European Province of SSF. Alan Michael, Kevin and Nicholas Alan have been ordained priest. Nicholas Alan has begun a term as Guardian of Glasshampton and Benedict has moved to Hilfield as Guardian there. Amos has moved to Glasshampton. James Anthony has returned to the UK from Tanzania, and is now on Holy Island. Philip Bartholomew has moved to St Matthias' Vicarage. Jason Robert has formally transferred to the European Province from the Province of the Americas whilst Jonathan Guthlac (as he is now known) has transferred the other way. Kentigern John has returned to the UK from the Australia-New Zealand Province and is now at Hilfield. Clifton Henry was expected to arrive at St Matthias' Vicarage in the summer for a year's stay in the province.

Christine James and Moyra have moved to St Matthew's House in Leicester, where they will be involved primarily with the people on the St Matthews estate.

Donald celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his profession on 17 March.

In the CSF Province of the Americas, Jean has been re-elected Minister Provincial

2007 is the eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, one of the patrons of the Third Order. To mark the anniversary, Third Order members have arranged Eucharistic celebrations to be held in Darlington (21 July) and on 17 November at the Altar of St Francis and St Elizabeth in Southwark Cathedral.

Robert Coombes has been released from his life vows and membership of SSF. *f*