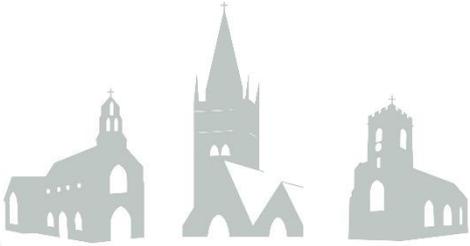


*The
Oil
of
Gladness*



Thoughts and Prayers
for the season of
Ascensiontide




THE *P*ARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES



Introduction



It has been a richness of our parish life since 2016's week-long celebration 'The Hope within Us' that we have used the nine-day period between of Ascensontide (Ascension Day until Pentecost) as a time of focused prayer. With eyes cast toward the Church's third great festival, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we, like the Disciples with some womenfolk, the Mother of Jesus and his brothers (Acts 1.14), have prayerfully waited to celebrate that coming.

Numerous themes suit this short season: the gifts of the Spirit, the Spirit's fruits, the three great 'theological 'virtues' (faith, hope and love), to name obvious ones. This year, though, our season of waiting includes the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. With that on our minds and hearts as well as in the memory and imagination of many I have chosen 'the oil of gladness' for Ascensontide's *novena* (nine-days) as the theme of our praying. The phrase comes from Psalm 45 (verse 7) which relates to a royal occasion; the psalm may in fact be a royal wedding song.¹ But the Bible is full of references to oil, and chief among those references and its images, for Christians at least, is Jesus himself, the 'messiah', that is, the *Anointed One* (in Greek *Christos*) who shares that anointing through his own first gift to believers, the Holy and Life-Giving Spirit.

Jesus' kingship is one with his anointing, since from the start of its royal tradition the Hebrews anointed their monarchs. 'Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king and all the people rejoiced' we read in 1 Kings.

So it is no surprise that as the religio-political institution of kingship developed in Christian lands the solemn ceremony that set apart a king or queen included the ceremony and ritual of anointing with oil. That custom was institutionalized during the reign of the Frankish emperor Charlemagne. In the Anglo-Saxon period it was Archbishop of Canterbury Dunstan (d.988) who developed that and other ceremonies of king-making for the English in ways still present in the Coronation Service of Queen Elizabeth II on June 2, 1953.

In the popular imagination the high-point and essence of that service is the crowning. In fact, though, as Archbishop Fisher pointed out when he commented on the service, the solemn setting-apart and empowering of the Queen for her sacred duties is the act of anointing with the Holy Oil of *Chrism*. On that day it was very much an 'oil of gladness', so it is right for us on this Jubilee occasion to recall the 'oil of gladness' in its royal and other rich meanings.

What follows is to help us all do that over the next nine days.

Charles Miller Team Rector

¹ So Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms* in The Old Testament Library series [Eng. trans.](Westminster: Philadelphia 1962), pp. 360-1.

*An Invocation of the Spirit*²

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Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire;
thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart:³

Thy blessèd unction from above is comfort, life, and fire of love;
enable with perpetual light the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soilèd face with the abundance of thy grace:
keep far our foes, give peace at home; where thou art guide no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son, and Thee, of both, to be but One;
that through the ages all along this may be our endless song,

Praise to thy eternal merit, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

~

² This hymn text is by the 17th-century divine John Cosin, Chaplain to Queen Henrietta Maria and Bishop of Durham after the Restoration. He translated this mediaeval Latin hymn for his *Collection of Private Devotions in the Practice of the Ancient Church, Called the Hours of Prayer, etc.* (1627). In the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* it replaced a translation from the 1549 version. Its singing begins the third and main part of the Coronation service, namely, the rite of Anointing. The hymn is used at the ordination services of bishops, priest and deacons.

³ The 'sevenfold gifts' are wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord and understanding; see Isaiah 11.2-3.

Friday, May 27th

'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.'

(Genesis 1.1-3)

Hymn - *Come, Holy Ghost*, see previous page

Reflection

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'anointing' like this: 'smear or rub with oil, typically as part of a religious ceremony...'. We sometimes use the word more widely and figuratively to signal being endued or endowed with some characteristic or power. It may be a stretch, but

I think of the Spirit's sweeping over the watery chaos as an *anointing* of sorts. The story suggests that the Spirit is working to bring light out of darkness, cosmos out of chaos. The

use of oils for anointing in its religious as indeed other purposes in its Old and New Testamental contexts seems to me to pick-up this first action of the Spirit in the story of creation: making things "good", creating abundance and harmony in the ways of the world.

Prayer

Lord God, in the beginning you bestowed your Spirit over things unformed to give them comeliness and order: may we welcome your ever-present Spirit to bring order to our lives and glory to your name; for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ in whose name we prayer.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Saturday, May 28th

'So Jacob rose early in the morning and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the place Bethel...Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house...!'

(Genesis 28.18-22)

Hymn - O God of Bethel

*O GOD of Bethel, by whose hand
thy people still are fed,
who through this weary pilgrimage hast all our fathers fed.
Through each perplexing path of life
our wandering footsteps guide;
give us each day or daily bread,
and raiment fit provide.
O spread thy covering wings around
till all our wanderings cease,
and at our Father's loved abode
our souls arrive in peace.*

Reflection

Here we see how rudimentary religious acts use oil to set apart and consecrate. We also see that the anointed pillar is connected with God's abiding presence and with a vow of fidelity to the Almighty.

Prayer

Lord God, as you call us in Jesus Christ to be living stones, anoint us with your Spirit that our hearts of stone may be turned to hearts of flesh, full of goodness, truth and compassion.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Sunday, May 29th

'You water the hills from your dwelling on high; the earth is filled with the fruit of your works. You make grass to grow for the cattle and plants to meet our needs, bringing forth food from the earth and wine to gladden our hearts. Oil to give us a cheerful countenance and bread to strengthen our hearts.'

(Psalm 104.14-17)

Hymn - *Now sanctify us, Spirit*

Come, Holy Ghost, with God the Son,

and God the Father, ever one;

send forth thy grace within our breast,

and dwell with us a ready guest.

By every power, by heart and tongue,

by act and deed thy praise be sung;

in flame with perfect love each sense,

that others' souls may kindle thence. Amen.

Reflection

While we all appreciate the availability of cheap olive oil, a fine, pure olive oil is still an expensive purchase, a precious thing for the kitchen. And how much more so in the ancient world! References to oil in the Bible often suggest a precious commodity and, like the earth's abundant fruits and 'wine to gladden our hearts', oil is a sign of abundance and blessing. No wonder the Psalm begins 'Bless the Lord, O my soul!...and forget not all his benefits' as the psalmist surveys the good earth and sees it as a blessing from the Creator God. Oil's preciousness will make it both an accompaniment of the great banquet imagery of the end-time and the key ingredient in the setting apart of kings.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may the Holy Spirit anointing us at our baptism and confirmation gladden our hearts through this life that we may enter joyfully into the everlasting banquet of your sons and daughters; for the sake of him who is the first of many brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Monday, May 30th

'So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cerethites and Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and led him to Gihon. There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!".

(1 Kings 1.38-9)

Hymn - *Creator Spirit, by whose aid*

O Source of uncreated light, the Father's promis'd Paraclete,⁴

thrice holy Fount, thrice holy Fire,

our hearts with heavenly love inspire;

Come, and thy sacred unction bring to sanctify us while we sing.

Reflection

This is the episode of royal anointing that the composer Handel made so famous in his setting 'Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king'. The composer wrote it for the coronation of King George II and it has been used ever since. Commenting on 'the fiery splendour' of this anthem when sung at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 Frank Howes notes how 'the pent-up feelings of rejoicing find their first expression as the central rite of the ceremony is reached. The 'central rite' to which he refers is the anointing of the Queen, and its centrality is true to the episode which his anthem describes. What makes Solomon king is the *anointing* - no orb or sceptre, no crown. Just the 'oil of gladness' does it!

Prayer

Father in heaven, during this season of prayerful waiting to celebrate the Spirit's descent, make us daily mindful of the anointing that we have received through the ministrations of the Church, the Spirit-anointed Body of your Son; and guide us to use like a precious oil our gifts and graces to the glory of your name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

⁴ Jesus uses this term 'paraclete' (Gr. *paraklētos*) to describe the Spirit whom the Father will send to his disciples to be their 'advocate', 'supporter', 'legal aid' (!). See John 14.15-16; 15.26.

Did you know?

Every Maundy Thursday in Holy Week the Bishop of the Diocese with other clergy gather at the cathedral for the so-called 'Chrism Mass'. It's called that because the holy oils which the Church uses in its services of baptism, confirmation, healing, ordination and coronation are consecrated (set-apart) by prayer and blessing. The parish clergy bring a supply of these oils to their parishes for use through the coming year.

Bishop Richard Rutt⁵ (d. 2011) took inspiration from an early Latin hymn and wrote this hymn for the occasion of the yearly Chrism Mass:

*Blest by the sun, the olive tree brought clusters of fair fruit to birth,
whose ripeness now we bring with prayer, Lord Christ, redeemer of the earth.*

*Eternal King, look down and bless the oil your servants offer here,
and may it be a lively sign which all the powers of darkness fear.*

*From those washed in the sacred font let Satan's influence depart,
and when this oil the brow shall seal transforming grace invade the heart.*

*Our wounded nature thus be healed by your anointing grace, O Lord;
in men and women so renewed shall God's own image be restored.*

*Lord Christ, the father's only Son, who took our flesh in Mary's womb,
give light to your anointed ones, and break the power of death's dark tomb.*

*So may this joyous paschal feast, the time when saving grace is given,
fill every Christian soul with praise, and raise our minds from earth to heaven. Amen.*

⁵ Onetime Bishop of Leicester.

Tuesday, May 31st

'Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.'

(1 Corinthians 9.24-5)

Hymn - Come, Holy Spirit

Come, of comforters the best, of the soul the sweetest guest,

come in toil refreshingly:

thou in labour rest most sweet, thou art shadow from the heat,

comfort in adversity.

What is soilèd, make thou pure; what is wounded, work its cure;

what is parchèd fructify;

what is rigid rightly bend; what is frozen warmly tend;

straighten what goes erringly. Amen.

Reflection

When Peter acknowledged Jesus as 'the Christ' (Mark 8.29) he was recognizing him as the 'anointed one' of God ('*Christos*' in Greek, 'messiah' in Hebrew). Just as Jesus had been anointed with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Acts 10.38), so it became customary to make the sign of the cross in oil on the heads of candidates for baptism as a sign of their anointing with the Spirit in union with Christ. This use of oil recalls the ancient use of oil by athletes as preparation for struggle in competition and win the athletic crown.

Prayer

Gracious God, make me ever mindful of the cross marked upon my brow, that I may live bravely and witness valiantly to your truth and goodness, empowered by the Spirit given me in baptism and confirmation. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Wednesday, June 1st

'Now I know that the Lord will save his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven, and with the mighty strength of his right hand...O Lord, save the king, and answer us when we call upon you.'

(Psalm 20. 6, 9)

Hymn - Come, Holy Spirit

*Fill thy faithful, who confide in thy power to guard and guide,
with thy sevenfold Mystery.*

*Here thy grace and virtue send: grant salvation in the end,
and in heaven felicity. Amen.*

Reflection

The Order for the Coronation of the Monarch has four main elements: 1. the Entrance of Her Majesty in the Church, with Recognition, Oath and giving of the Bible; 2. the Celebration of Holy Communion, which contains within it; 3. the Consecration of the Queen by Anointing, Investiture, Coronation, Enthroning and, lastly, the Homage; and 4. a final act of Thanksgiving including the singing of the *Te Deum* and the National Anthem. The anointing with the Oil of Chrism is the ceremony that accompanies the rite of regal consecration. This consecration reiterates the use of holy oil at other points in a Christian's life but, like all ritual acts, focuses by overt intention the purpose for which the anointing is given, in this case, for the due Christian exercise of regal service, power and authority, most of which in a 'constitutional monarchy' like Britain's the monarch now delegates to 'Her Majesty's government'.

Prayer

God of joy and gladness, the Psalmist sang "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'"; may I enter the timely temple of each day in joy for my creation and preservation and in hope for your Spirit's aid in all my thinking, speaking and doing; for the sake of him who is the source and perfection of all earthly endeavours, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Thursday, June 2nd

The Seventieth Anniversary of the Queen's Accession

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'Behold our defender, O God, and look upon the face of thine Anointed, for one day in thy courts is better than a thousand.'

(Psalm 84.8-9)

Hymn - *Come, Holy Ghost*, see the text on page 2

Reflection

The composer Herbert Howells wrote an anthem on those verses from Psalm 84 as the Introit of the Communion Service (that is, the second main part) of the Coronation. Centuries before, St Dunstan had moved the coronation ceremony to a point *within* the Communion Service following the pattern for the consecration of bishops. The Order in 1953 reflected that structure. Following the singing of the ancient hymn 'Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire' the Archbishop of Canterbury prays:

'O LORD and heavenly Father, the exalter of the humble and the strength of thy chosen, who by anointing with Oil didst of old make and consecrate kings, priests and prophets, to teach and govern thy people Israel: Bless and sanctify thy chosen servant Elizabeth, who by our office and ministry is now to be anointed with this Oil and consecrated Queen: Strengthen her, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter; Confirm and stablish her with thy free and princely Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and government, the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and fill her, O Lord, with the Spirit of holy fear, now and forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Handel's famous anthem *Zadok the priest* is sung, after which the Queen, laying aside royal robes and wearing a pure white linen tunic out of view of the congregation, is anointed. The Archbishop anoints her hands: *'Be thy Hands anointed with holy Oil'*; then the breast: *'Be thy Breast anointed with holy Oil'*, and finally the crown of her head:

'Be thy Head anointed with holy Oil: as kings, priests and prophets were anointed. And as Solomon was anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, so be thou anointed, blessed, and consecrated Queen over the Peoples, whom the Lord thy God hath given thee to rule and govern, In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'

Prayer

Bless, O Lord, our Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth that she may persevere with all spiritual gifts and strength in the duties of her calling, for our good and to the glory of your name.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Friday, June 3rd

'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

(1 Peter 1.9)

Hymn - Come, Creator Spirit

Come, O Creator Spirit, come and make within our hearts thy home; to us thy grace celestial give, who of thy breathing move and live.

O Comforter, that name is thine, of God most high the gift divine; the well of life the fire of love, our souls' anointing from above.

Our senses with thy light inflame, our hearts to heavenly love reclaim; our bodies' poor infirmity, with strength perpetual fortify. Amen.

Reflection

Chrism is not just a fine olive oil; it is made fragrant by the addition of spices. At the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday this prayer is said by the bishop over the Oil of Chrism:

'Blessed are you, sovereign God and eternal Father, upholding by grace all who hear your call. Under your Old Covenant priests and kings were anointed to serve you and in the fullness of time you anointed your Son by the Holy Spirit to be the Christ, the Saviour and Servant of all. By the power of your Spirit may your blessing rest on all who are anointed with this chrism in your name; let it be for them a sign of joy and gladness as they share in the royal priesthood of the New Covenant and make known the kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit we lift our voices of thanks and praise.'

The solidarity of a Christian monarch with his or her people is spiritual before all else. Its basis is of course a shared faith in God and God's good purposes for humankind and the world. Yet the bond is all the deeper and stronger because the monarch, the clergy and the baptized are *together* variously *anointed* as parts of the same Spirit-led Body of Christ. *All* of them/us are under the kingship of Christ.

Prayer

Eternal Father, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King: keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole creation to worship at his feet; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Saturday, June 4th

'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of the same Spirit.'

(1 Corinthians 12.12-13).

Hymn - O King enthroned on high

O KING enthroned on high, thou Comforter divine, blest Spirit of all truth, be nigh and make us thine.

Thou art the Source of life, thou art our treasure-store; give us thy peace, and end our strife for evermore.

Descend, O heavenly Dove, abide with us always; and in the fullness of thy love, cleanse us, we pray.

Reflection

At the Chrism Mass the bishops pray this prayer over the Oil of Baptism:

'Blessed are you, sovereign God, the protector of all who believe in you. Your anointed Son overcame the powers of evil when he was lifted high upon the cross. By the power of your Spirit may your blessing rest on those who are anointed with this oil in your name; as they come to the waters of baptism may it be for them a sign of your defence in their fight against sin, the world and the devil, and bring them to share in Christ's victory.'

As a sharer in the varied Gifts of the Spirit about which St Paul speaks, the Sovereign, whom one theologian has called 'the First Layperson' in the realm, plays a part in the defence of God's people 'in their fight against sin, the world and the devil' and in gaining a share in Christ's victory. At the Benediction before the actual Enthronement the Archbishop prays that 'by the vigilant care of his anointed servant, our gracious Sovereign' her people might 'enjoy peace, plenty, and prosperity'--what Psalm 85 means by 'the oil of gladness'.

Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, you have given us your servants new birth in baptism by water and the Spirit, and have forgiven all our sins: Let your Holy Spirit rest upon us: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and inward strength; the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and let our delight be in the fear of the LORD. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Pentecost, Sunday, June 5th

A Morning Devotion

'Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?...God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.'

(1 Corinthians 3.16, 17)

Hymn - from *Love divine*

Come, almighty, to deliver, let us all thy grace receive, suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave.

Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above; pray, and praise thee, without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation: pure and spotless let us be; let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;

changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee lost in wonder, love and praise.

Prayers

To the Spirit

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire; strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love, and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Her Majesty on Her Jubilee

God of time and eternity, whose Son reigns as servant, not master; we give you thanks and praise that you have blessed this nation, the realms and territories with Elizabeth, our beloved and glorious Queen. In this year of Jubilee, grant her your gifts of love, joy and peace as she continues in faithful obedience to you, her Lord and God, and in devoted service to her lands and peoples, and those of the Commonwealth, now and all the days of her life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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