

NONES – ST MATTHEW’S DARLEY ABBEY, SUNDAY 7 MAY 2017

Welcome – to this rather special, rather unique service, the service of Nones. That sentence is ridiculous, Nones should be anything but special and unique. Here in Darley Abbey we had an Augustinian Priory – we’ll think about the history of that later in this service – and Nones was a daily service. Monks and nuns, in this abbey and every other, would normally meet in church for prayer eight times a day.

Eight services – Matins (often said in the middle of the night, go to Hexham Abbey, where our Gareth was verger, and there is a night stair so the monks could do directly from their dormitory to the church). Lauds, Prime (6 am). Terce, Sext at noon, Nones at 3, Vespers and Compline

Eight services, every day – the rhythm of the monastic day. Even something like the wonderful Cadfael books of Ellis Peters, or the TV series with Derek Jacobi, did not convey that rhythm. This is the worship every day, eight times a day the bell would toll, eight times a day you would enter the church, eight times a day you stand in your place, eight times a day you would pray.

Orare est laborare, laborare est orare – to pray is to work, to work is to pray. Words of St Benedict, over the door of Lincoln Theological College – I passed them every day.

I’m sure it wasn’t always easy to pray – in the middle of the night, on a freezing cold morning, when the monk you stood next to eight times a day had a cold and sniffed all through the psalms – but in a world even more fragile than ours’ the daily routine, the daily pattern of prayer, would surely have been a strength.

Our Nones is slightly different. We will use English, not Latin. When we say the psalms those of us on this side say the verses in ordinary type, those of you on that side respond with the verses in bold. The monks would have paused in the middle of each verse (where the asterisk is) – indeed we did that at Theological College and many of you were brought up with that traditional way we did them. We won’t do that today, because when you’re not used to it you spend the whole psalm worried about the pause, and not thinking about the words themselves. We will pause between each new psalm.

As we are in the Easter season we will sing Alleluia on various occasions. We’re using the version in the hymn book at number 23, but you don’t need to look it up – it is simply “Alleluia” sung eight times. So let’s stand, sing Alleluia, and worship.

History

I have always enjoyed history – and not just history of railways. I love these old buildings in which we worship, and the tradition of which we are part. In every new community I have enjoyed being part of the Local History Society. In every new community you need to learn the history – so I need your help to learn it here. May I give you my understanding and, if I'm wrong, correct me.

Christianity first came to those shores during Roman times – the original Roman settlement in Derby was this side of the river, the later one at Little Chesters just across the Derwent. Perhaps the first Christian in Darley Abbey was someone who heard the good news of Jesus from a soldier who had been posted north from the warmth of the Mediterranean.

After the Empire died and the Christian faith pretty much died out, it took a century or two before that Christian faith was rekindled. By the late 650s a monastery was established at Repton – St Werburgh, a double house for nuns and monks. If you haven't explored the Saxon crypt of that lovely parish church, please go. You can read about it on my blog – www.northernvicar.co.uk

St Alkmund, the son of a Northumbrian King, born about 770 – a Christian prince. He was caught up in the fighting of royal factions, fled south, and was eventually killed, murdered, somewhere in Mercia, in this part of the world. He was proclaimed a saint, a martyr, and it is probable that the coffin now in Derby museum, the coffin that came from the old St Alkmund's church, now under the ring road, was his.

By about 800 a minster church had been built, somewhere in what is now our city (perhaps the site of the old St Alkmund's). A Saxon burgh was founded by 920, and All Saints (now Cathedral) was the minster church. By the eleventh century we know there were eight parish churches, all grouped along the north-south spinal road paralleling the Derwent, including St Helen's (later nucleus of abbey of Darley). North of these city churches, our villages have churches too – St Edmund's in Allestree probably dates to round about the Norman conquest.

In the twelfth century Augustinian monks established an Oratory, a place of prayer, based on this chapel of St Helen. St Augustine was fourth century Christian theologian who have lived and worked in North Africa. Five hundred years later, religious communities based on his work, his rule, sprung up across Europe. By 1200 AD there were 170 Augustinian foundations in England, including Repton and Calke. Further afield, there was a major Augustinian Priory at Merton in south London, and they – the Friends of Merton Priory - are

the ones who encouraged us to say Nones today. We are joining with them and others across the country and further afield this afternoon.

The Augustinians were devoted to service to the community, there was no private ownership, they lived in poverty, were involved in the lives of ordinary people, lived communal within the religious house. They were known as Black Canons because of their dress.

In 1137 2nd Earl of Derby, Robert, provided land for an Abbey at Derley (meaning deer lea or deer glade). Hugh, the Dean of Derby (an important man in the town, not Dean in the sense of head of the Cathedral), Hugh offered Albin all his land if he erected abbey and Albin accepted this offer to quit “the smoak of Derby and keep his Lent upon the delightful banks of the Derwent”. I got the quote from this book - The Citizen’s Historic Darley Abbey, Derbyshire, Darley Abbey, The Citizen, 1989 - but it’s not a book that gives its sources. Earl Robert endowed this abbey with income from the churches in Uttoxeter and Crich, and a tenth of the rents he received from properties in Derby. The Abbey church was completed in 1146, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It was built at roughly the same time as Melbourne church. I haven’t been to Melbourne yet, but it looks quite a church – imagine our abbey church being like that.

This Abbey lasted for 400 years – that is twice as long as this, our parish church. By the beginning of the C16 it had accumulated great wealth and power based on property and rents, timber, wool and lead, fees and gifts. People made gifts to the abbey for a number of reasons, because of their religious faith, to atone for their sins, to secure their place in heaven, or because they joined the Order, or as some sort of status symbol – look what I can afford to give. By 1538 the Abbey owned the Derby churches of SS Michael, Peter, Werburgh, and churches in Ashover, Bolsover, Crich, Pentrich, Scarcliffe, Shirley, Stowe, Uttoxeter, and Wingfield. It owned the manors of Aldwark, Crich, Dethick, Hognaston, Ible, Lea, Oakerthorpe, Ripley, Smalldale, Souchthorn, Tansley and Wessington – and land all over the Midlands, plus Derby school, hospital of St Helen’s, Ripley Market – imagine its wealth, importance and influence. Clive, our church treasurer, is rubbing his hands together at thought of all that income!

There would have been a huge workforce and community – clerics, administrators, craftsmen, labourers, brewers, farmers, foresters, masons, millers – I wonder how many. This abbey would attract travellers along the North South road. One of its functions was to provide shelter to travellers, apparently both Henry III and Edward I stayed here. There would have been traders buying lead and wool, there would have been paupers, the hungry coming to the equivalent of a food bank. And in all of this, eight sessions of prayer, every day – because prayer comes first.

This year we mark 500 years since the start of the Reformation – and the lecture on 24 May (repeated on 30 May) will tell that story, from Luther through to the Dissolution of our Abbey. Under King Henry VIII, the Act of Suppression was passed in 1536. Religious houses with income of less than £200 per year were confiscated by the king. Darley Abbey was worth £258 14s 5d, but on 22 October 1538 Thomas Page, the Abbot, and 13 of his canons surrendered the keys of the Abbey to Dr Legh the Crown Commissioner. Two days later, Robert Sacheverell, gentleman of Ashbourne, bought the contents of the church, the Lady chapel and St Scythe's chapel, the lamps, candlesticks, organs, choir stalls, altars, great crucifix, alabaster tables, timber, paving, gravestones and metal on them, clothing, chests, and tables, all for £26. Another £4 17s 4d was spent on the bedsteads and bedding from the Lowe, Glasse, Second, Great, and Mayfield Rooms, four inner chambers, and servants' rooms, £16 4s 2d paid for furniture and utensils of Hall, Buttery, pantry, Parlour, kitchen, pastry larder, Brewhouse, and bakehouse – etc., etc.

The Abbot and the canons were pensioned off – the Abbot got a pension of £50, Thomas Tutman, the schoolmaster got 26s 8 d. I like the way the clergy get more than the teachers!

It is absolutely incredible that everything (perhaps with the exception of the Abbey Inn) has gone, and gone so completely. This book by Geoffrey Moorhouse [The Last Office](#) describes the closure of the Abbey at Durham, the drastic changes there – but of course in Durham, they did not demolish the Abbey Church, just made it into a Cathedral. Here, as the church of St Alkmund was only a mile away, this Abbey church went completely. We don't even know where it was. Incredible.

Yet the Christian faith was not destroyed, 300 years later a new church would be built for the new community that grew up here, and in two years time we will mark the bicentenary of this church. The psalmist gets it right ...

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house * they will be always praising thee.

Peter Barham
7 May 2017