

## Hope Springs Eternal

It was while I was studying for my A Levels at the local Tech that my life reached a certain crisis point. I had geared the whole of my expectations and my academic options towards being a doctor since the age of five. Yet, now at 18, in the midst of my A Levels when my dream was hopefully about to enter a decisive phase, doubt had crept in; I found myself fighting a strong inner voice urging me to offer myself for the priesthood. While trying to sort this dilemma out I sought refuge and space to think in two particular ways.

On a Wednesday when my lectures finished at lunch time, I would hop on the number 14 bus at the top of our road and go into Winchester for Evensong at the cathedral. I found the sublime beauty of the ceremony took me to another place inside myself where I felt I encountered God and brought my struggle to him. The other way I found solace and thinking space was cycling on a Saturday morning to the ruins of Waverley Abbey alongside the River Wey at Moor Park. Those nostalgic ruins still had a strong aura of holiness and prayerfulness that I found calming and inspiring, the perfect setting in which to think through, in his presence, what plans God might have for me.

Although the dissolution of the monasteries undoubtedly put paid to a lot of greed, corruption and abuse associated with the religious orders, I still think it was the greatest act of vandalism this country has ever suffered; hundreds of poignant ruins around the country bear forlorn and silent testimony to what might have been. But, however regrettable the destruction of the monasteries may have been, it was not the end of the world; God was still in our world and I sensed His presence powerfully in that place and that drew me back time and again.

Jesus has a similar message in the Gospel today. He overhears some people commenting on the fine stonework of the Temple, but he tells them: 'All these things you are staring at now – the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.' He goes on to say that this will not be the end of the world, though it may seem like it. He tells them that they will witness and experience many other things that will shake their faith and force them to think that it is all over for humankind – wars, revolutions, nation fighting against nation, earthquakes, plagues and famines and many fearful sights.

As we look round our world today it is easy to lose hope, to think our faith, our existence, our very planet are on a slippery slope to destruction. The signs are there in the earth, the sea and the sky that things are changing, that our all too solid and unchangeable earth is showing how fragile it truly is and is rapidly undergoing cataclysmic and irreversible change that will affect our lives and the very existence of future generations, and it's easy to relate this to the portents in the firmament that Jesus

tells us will precede the end of the world. But Jesus tells us that the time is not yet and that we are not to lose hope when we see these things happening, but to put our trust in God and in him, for he reassures us that he will be with us in all the circumstances of our lives until the end of time. He will never desert us and will always give us strength 'to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes'. With every trial, as St Paul says, he will give us 'a way through it or the strength to bear it'.

Whenever my faith wavers I turn to that wonderful passage in Romans 8 where St Paul writes:

After saying this, what can we add? With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give...Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked...These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us. For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8 31-32, 35, 37-39)