



## The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter – September 2007

### 1662 & 1962

**L**AST MONTH, the Bible: this month how we celebrate the Eucharist....

If you have followed the story in the newspapers about the revival of the 'old' Catholic Mass, you might have been struck by the similarities between the battle in the Church of England (BCP versus ASB) and the battle in the Catholic Church between the 'old' and the 'new' Mass. In both cases, those who want the 'old' version are a smaller group, very vocal, often highly educated, more lay people than clergy. In both cases, those who prefer the 'new' version are people who find it easier to understand and easier to join in with. Interestingly, in both cases, some of those who prefer the 'old' are people who were not born when the 'old' was the norm and some of those who prefer the 'new' are people who grew up with, and were formed by the 'old'. There are issues of language: the 'old' is at least archaic (Cranmer's English) if not in an 'old' language (Latin). There are issues of culture: the 'old' is Eastward-facing, something you listen to and participate with internally rather than sing along with. There are issues of theology: the 'old' spoke of a transcendent God, reigning in majesty, of penitence and sacrifice; the 'new' celebrates God in our midst and the fellowship meal we share with one another.

The Church of England tackled the problem of 'old' and 'new' with Common Worship. Common Worship has 'old' and 'new' texts alongside each other and its Calendar and Lectionary are an attempt to bring together the best of 'old' and 'new'. The Catholic Church is tackling the same problem by allowing limited use of the 'old' alongside the 'new'. In the Pope's apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum*, issued on 07-07-07 (a mystical date henceforth for many), he makes the interesting provision that some of the 'new' material – the Mass Prefaces and newly-canonised saints, for example – can be used with the 'old' Mass. He also allows the 'new' lectionary (in English, or whatever the local language) to be used with the 'old' (Latin) Mass.

All of this is an interesting reflection of the times we live in. A generation ago the Church 'went modern': concrete and polyester, guitars and Mother's Pride. Today we have 'gone heritage': pointy arches and silk, plainsong and Holy Hour. It isn't hard to see the same trends in the wider culture, in architecture, literature, music and theatre. Whether we like it or not, each of us is a child of our times, whether 1662 (the last authorised Prayer Book) or 1962 (the latest version of the 'old Mass'). We can make these concerns a selfish preoccupation – what **we** like at our church, what **we** insist on having. Or we can offer them up to God, the Lord of every age, praying and discerning how we may best order our worship of him that others – our friends, our community, our neighbours – may best be drawn to know him. In other words, it's not what **we** want, it's what we discern will serve him best.

May God bless you as you seek to worship and serve him.

+ Andrew Ebbsfleet

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