

Walsingham Bible Week 2012
Monday 29 October - Friday 2 November
St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Eph. 3:10-11



I first visited Walsingham in 2005 when I was fourteen, on the annual Youth Pilgrimage with a group from my parish church in Cheltenham. That experience was for me very significant in my spiritual formation as I joined with many other younger Christians in the mysteries of Christ, and I feel that this was the beginning of a journey of discernment of a vocation to ministry in the Church. I remember being moved by the various services and events that week from Mass in the large tent erected on the campsite just outside the village to my first experience of Benediction in the Shrine gardens. I also remember being given a leaflet about vocation to ministry with little idea why I had it or what I was going to do with it, but that I might think about it later!

So I was particularly grateful for the opportunity to return to Walsingham this year now I am exploring my vocation in a much more practical way than I could have expected then! We went in October as a group of fourteen from our three parishes on the week led by Bishop Lindsay Urwin, with the hope of engaging with the text of St Paul's letter to the Ephesians as well as joining the other two hundred pilgrims in a busy and varied programme of services in the Shrine Church.

Bishop Lindsay spoke about Walsingham as a 'full immersion' experience, and stressed how this should be in both Scripture and the Sacraments: this was certainly true of the Bible Week. In the verses of Ephesians quoted above, it is made clear that it is the role of the Church to bear witness to the wisdom of God through the dissemination of Scripture and through the administration of Sacrament, and the Bible Week gave us the opportunity to engage with that process ourselves very closely; but it also renewed us in our spirit so that we could come back to our own parishes and be better communicators of the mysteries of Christ in our daily work. Having taken part in so many services at the Shrine made beautiful through liturgy, music and prayer; having contemplated the ineffable grace and mercy of God and received them through the Eucharist and through the Sacraments of reconciliation and anointing; having talked to, worshipped with, lived and eaten with and come to love so many people whose own faith was a source of strength: I have certainly found that I am better equipped to serve and listen to God and to minister to his people back here in Hornsey.



The word used in Ephesians to describe the wisdom of God is πολυποίκιλος: 'manifold,' or literally 'many-coloured.' Bishop Lindsay knew this word from the Septuagint translation of Genesis, where it describes Joseph's coat, and it was interesting for me to be able to recall a similar description of a technicolour robe in Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris*: in both uses, the word ποικίλος is already widely used classically and biblically to mean 'multi-coloured,' so the compound πολυ-ποικίλος emphatically depicts the variety and intensity of colours which emotionally arouse the visual senses. It seems that its use in the letter to the Ephesians implies that our engagement with the wisdom of God should stir the various senses just the same, and this is certainly the experience I found through the week at Walsingham!



I appreciated being able to participate in the services without having to prepare or lead them, but there were also particular things which made the liturgy especially beautiful, some of which I hope we can bring back into our worship in Hornsey (although we must be content with hoping for the setting in the attractive space of the Shrine Church and the company of so many faithful pilgrims!). I was grateful for the attention paid to the music in the liturgy, both in choosing and performing it: the motets sung before the extended silence in front of the Blessed Sacrament were very moving; there were some well-suited congregational settings of the responses to the Eucharist Rite which gave a pleasing unity to the prayer; and I found singing the Ave Maria before the Hour of Prayer a much appreciated change! Non-liturgical services such as the prayers and devotions to Mary and the Songs of Praise worked very well and we have plans to try a similar Marian service soon on a Sunday evening. At the healing service I took the opportunity to give my first private Confession, making Walsingham a recurrent place for firsts of this kind, following on from my experience of Benediction seven years ago!

If the week was a renewal and refreshing of spiritual life, it was also an affirmation of my discernment of vocation. A large part of this was being asked to give a short interview about my experience of Walsingham with Bishop Lindsay as part of the Songs of Praise service, something which the parish I think enjoyed despite their reservations at coming along! There were many people throughout the week who talked to me about my journey, perhaps through ordination, and there seemed to be mutual support: for me to help to affirm that I am discerning God's calling correctly; and for them to know that there are younger people such as Nick, Damien and myself looking to continue profession of the catholic and apostolic faith.





I hope Walsingham continues to be a place of spiritual nourishment for so many people and remains a place to withdraw from our daily lives and consider how we can better engage with the wisdom of God through the Church. I certainly appreciated immeasurably the opportunity to return to what is for me a particularly special place of vocation and I look forward to being able to retreat there in the future.

Max Drinkwater, Pastoral Assistant
November 2012

