

## A few words from the Vicarage ...



After the uplifting experience of Holy Week and Easter, there seemed little possibility that anything could top that! Then along came my week as Duty Chaplain in London at Westminster Abbey. With a flat provided on site in the Abbey cloisters (right under Big Ben with his relentless chiming each hour!) the position was almost quite idyllic.

It was a most wonderful experience to be a part of this national treasure, known worldwide and hugely respected by all who visit - whether as tourist or pilgrim. It was a huge privilege to simply 'be there' and even more so to be a part of the Abbey 'personnel'; charged with welcoming the thousands of people who crossed the threshold each day.

It was one of my duties to remind everyone that, quite apart from being a major tourist attraction, the Abbey is also a place of prayer and worship. So, each hour I would call for everyone to be still for a single minute as I led them in prayer. It was quite wonderful how everyone captured this minute - many of the visitors spoke very little or no English so, to see how they responded was amazing. Simply being in the Abbey pulpit to witness this was a great experience.

It was a delight too to see some visitors from the parish appear - my thanks to them for making the trip to support me.

Of course, having Elizabeth there and being joined by our daughter were sources of much pride - especially when I celebrated the mid-day Eucharist. There are few words which could describe how humbling and, indeed, how emotional it

was to stand at the Altar in the Abbey nave and celebrate this holiest of sacraments - saying those words of consecration for this mixed congregation of pilgrims and worshippers whilst the tourists meandered past seeking out the many treasures awaiting them as they did so.

Of course there are other responsibilities placed upon the Duty Chaplain - as it is the holder of that post to whom anyone seeking the services of a priest is directed by the Abbey staff - with the Sacraments of Confession and Anointing of the Sick being offered to all who wish to receive them. Twice each day prayers are also offered in the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor - the Shrine itself is no longer open to the public other than during these times of prayer, which are again led by the Duty Chaplain.

From Morning Prayer at 7.30 in St Faith's Chapel it is pretty much 'full on' until 4pm - leaving just enough time to wind down in readiness for Evensong at 5pm at which it was good to be able to sit quietly as the choir sang and the Abbey clergy led the worship.

I feel richly blessed for the experience ... and have signed up to return for another tour of duty next year.

God bless you all,

Your Vicar,

*Fr D.*