

## *From the Vicarage Window:*

*November 2023*

When we think of November we now probably think more of dark, wet days, rather than the frosty mornings, foggy evenings, and the increasing cold and dark which previous generations experienced. Yet whatever the changing climate may be bringing us, and it's the sheer unpredictability which is so difficult to plan for, the *darkness* of November remains real enough, and so too do all the natural human emotions which are tied to it. For most people now, Hallowe'en – a light-hearted and harmless festival of *spookiness* - has largely replaced Bonfire Night as a time of late autumn parties and celebrations. That's not altogether a bad thing, given its origins as Guy Fawkes Night, not to mention the traumatised animals, wild and domestic, left after long evenings of fire, smoke and loud explosions, but it's certainly a cultural change.

In the Church calendar November begins with All Saints and All Souls, those great commemorations of the Communion of Saints, the belief that we are all, living and departed, mysteriously united in the resurrection of Christ and the love of God. Moving on towards the middle of the month, we come to what used to be called *Martinmas*, for our medieval forbears the highly significant feast day of St Martin of Tours on 11<sup>th</sup> November and, because of the date of the armistice which ended the Great War in 1918, what has become our yearly commemoration of Remembrance, when we call to mind those who have died in war, either as combatants or as innocent victims, although the sheer callousness and destructive power of modern methods of warfare, together with the use of terror to achieve political ends, long ago blurred that particular distinction, as we know only too well at the moment from the bloody conflicts raging in Ukraine and in what seems to be an irreconcilable Middle East.

It's strange how for my generation – the rather pessimistic teenagers of the 1970s – the experience of the First World War had a far greater impact than that of the Second, despite being further away in time. Possibly, it's something very close to that feeling of being nearer in spirit to our grandparents than to our parents. Perhaps, but I remember being haunted along with my friends at school by the writings of the young war poets of the Great War, that lost generation who felt the shock and horror of their world ending in mud, mechanised slaughter, and the complete refusal of those in charge to value human life as it should be valued and to adapt to a world turned upside down.

It's curious how the parallels with what faces us now become more and more obvious, or perhaps it's not so curious – as a species we are never very quick to embrace necessary change, only highly adept at becoming infinitely adaptable to changed circumstances. And

that's the problem we have - somehow - to overcome, so that the hope we have in the better angels of our human nature can prevail.

November then, is a dark month, the darkness of the seasons mirroring the darkness of the world of humanity. But confronting the reality of the world and the reality of human nature can never be *completely* without hope, as we believe that hope, like love and mercy, is built into the reality of things by the one who made them.

**Fr Michael**