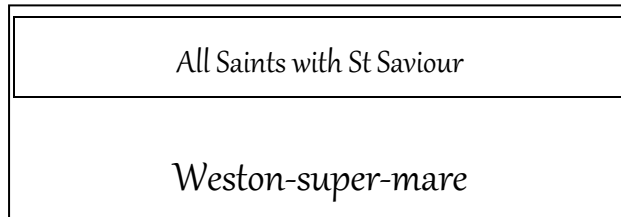




Arms of St Saviour



Arms of All Saints

17th March 2024

Dear friends,

My theme in these Lenten reflections (of which there are four – there wasn't one for Mothering Sunday) is the Tree of Life.

I invite you this Lent to consider trees, or perhaps a single tree; it may be a tree that is in your garden, or one that you can see from your window, or a tree that you walk past on your daily travels. I hope that particular tree will minister grace to you this Lent.

Sometimes, on solitary walks, I will stand beneath a great tree. I think of its roots beneath my feet; an intricate web anchored deep into the earth; a broad, expansive system, balancing the canopy above; its roots drawing water and nutrients, sustaining life, enabling growth and fruitfulness. I think of the trunk, strong, enduring; the hidden internal rings of the passing years; the life the trunk itself sustains, as insects feed in it and from it. And then the canopy; stark and mystical in winter; luxuriant in summer; glorious in autumn; full of promise in spring. A single tree to be with us during Lent.

IV

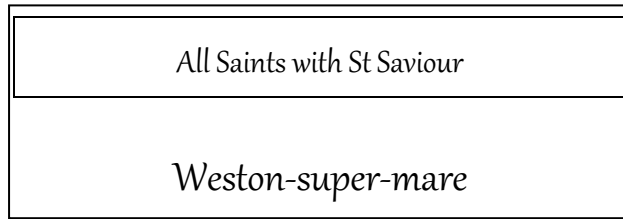
Our Scriptures begin with paradise, and they end with paradise. Genesis tells of Eden lost and Revelation tells of Eden restored. It is as if Psalm 1 has become universalised; we have water and we have the tree.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, through the middle of the streets of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22. 1, 2).

John's imagery is complex; we have the singular Tree of Life, and yet we have the idea of the Tree of Life on both banks of the river, although it is possible to translate his Greek as meaning one tree in the middle of the river. It doesn't really matter; indeed, there is something appealing about a brilliant river, bright as crystal, whose banks are lined with the Tree of Life, now multiplied to be all-embracing. This emphasises the fullness of salvation that the Cross achieved. For the tree is pictured as perpetually bearing twelve kinds of fruit every month; this is super-abundant fruitfulness; the garden restored, the figure twelve symbolising the in-gathering of all God's people of every time and age. And the luxuriant canopy of leaves is for the healing of the nations. The dominant theme is life, the river and the tree, and creation and the human race – all the human race - at last find healing. The grasses of the wilderness are transformed by the



Arms of St Saviour



Arms of All Saints

Crown of Thorns, for Lent is about renewal, the lengthening of days, the coming of Spring, the promise of Easter. Our personal renewal is an anticipation of our ultimate renewal; in this season of sacramental signs, ash, bread, wine, water, oil, all of them made fruitful by the Cross, the Tree of Life. The sacraments celebrate salvation, a renewed humanity and a renewed creation.

So, in this holy season, I invite you to consider a tree. I finish again with Wordsworth:

A single tree

*With sinuous trunk, boughs exquisitely wreathed,
Grew there; an ash which Winter for himself
Decked as in pride, and with outlandish grace:
Up from the ground, and almost to the top,
The trunk and every master branch were green
With clustering ivy, and the lightsome twigs
And outer spray profusely tipped with seeds
That hung in yellow tassels, while the air
Stirred them, not voiceless. Often I have stood
Foot-bound uplooking at this lovely tree
Beneath a frosty moon. The hemisphere
Of magic fiction, verse of mine perchance
May never tread; but scarcely Spenser's self
Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
Or could more bright appearances create
Of human forms with superhuman powers,
Than I beheld loitering on calm clear nights
Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth.*

William Wordsworth, The Prelude VI, 76-94

God our creator,
by your gift
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:
May we who have been nourished at your table on earth
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross
and enjoy the delights of eternity;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Post Communion prayer for the Second Sunday before Lent