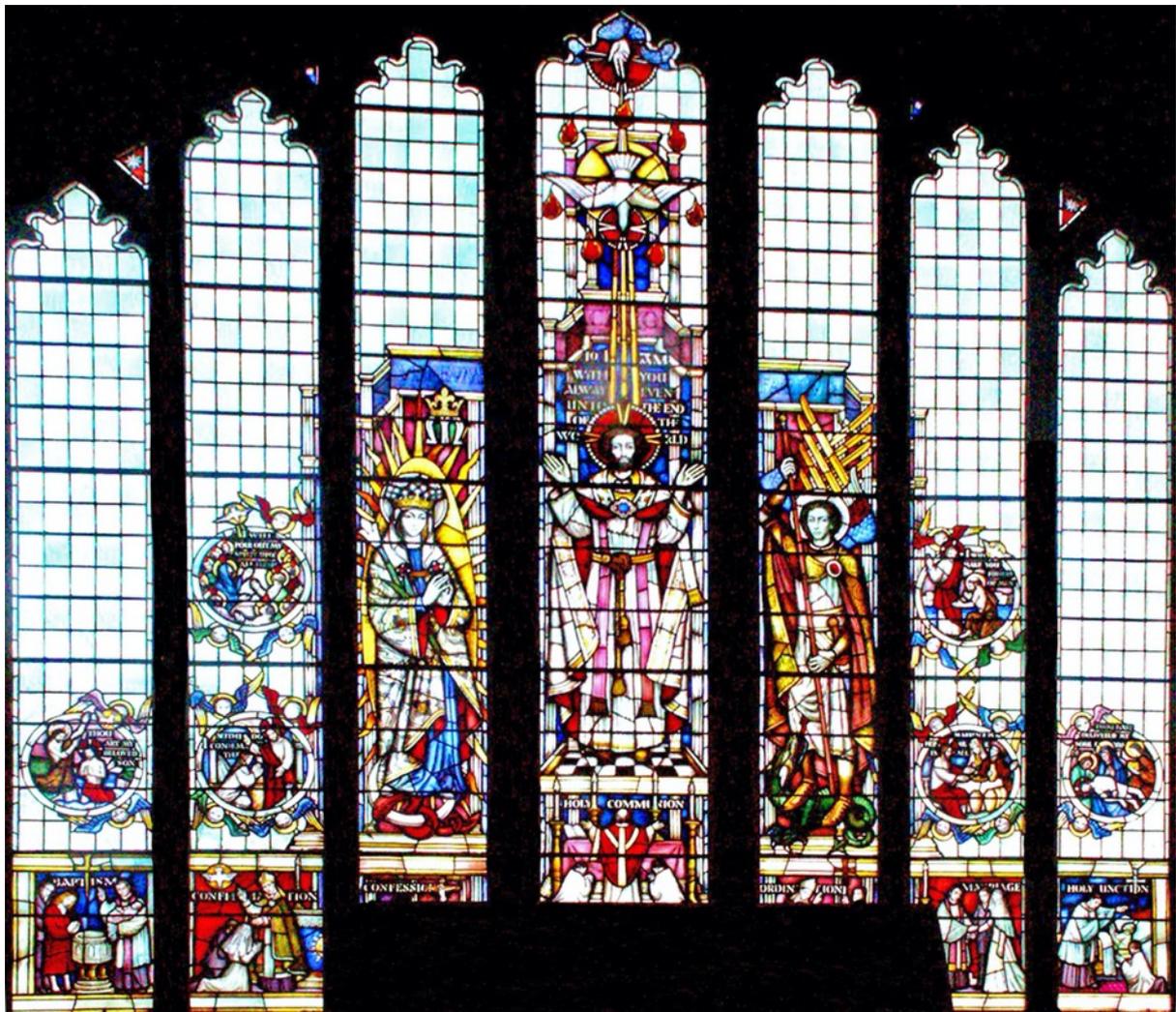


Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



The East Window

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading: Revelation 5:11-end

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,

‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!’

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!’

And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the elders fell down and worshipped.

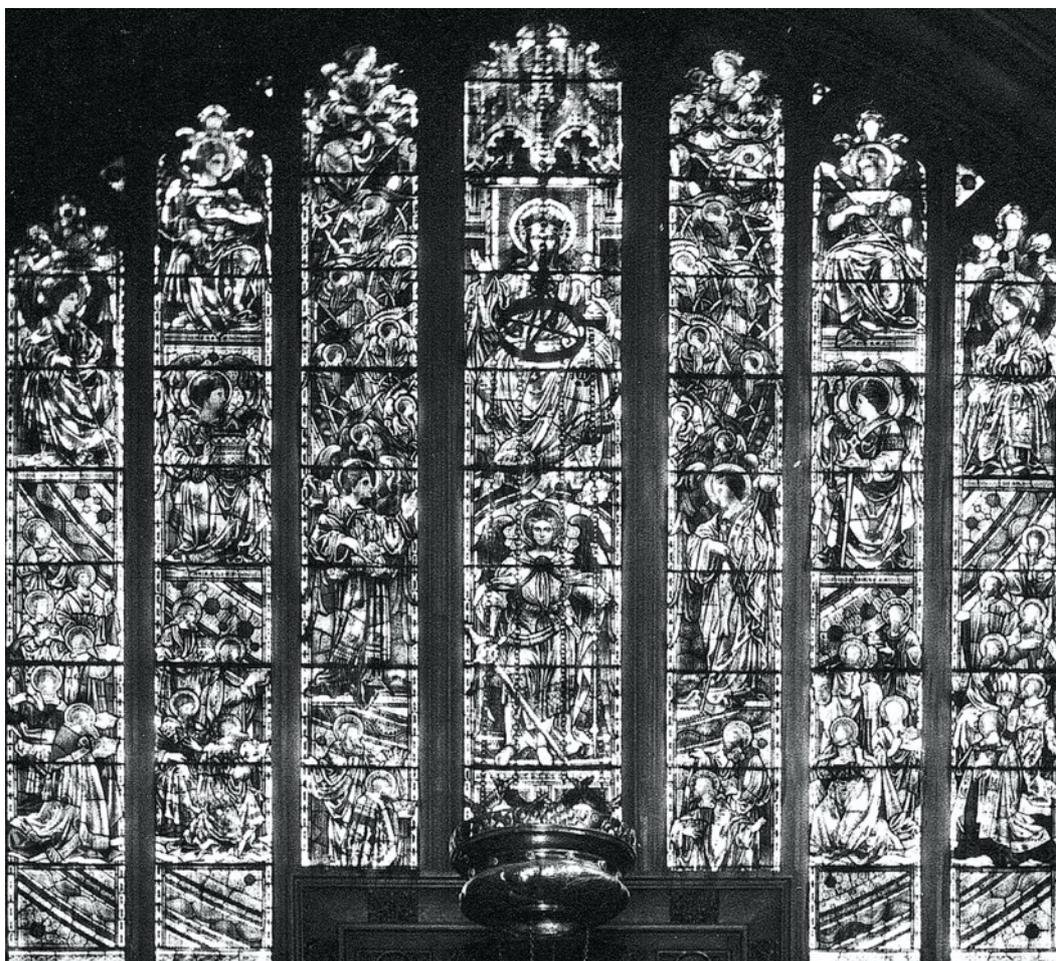
Commentary

After the Second World War, communities throughout the world were trying to rebuild themselves as they came to terms with the trauma of the War years and turned their minds to ‘the peace.’

Two million British homes were destroyed by bombing. More than two million people were made homeless and 45,000 civilians lost their lives including 8,000 children. Many others were scarred by the times they had lived through. Wartime rationing had to continue due to food shortages, but there was a strong sense for the need of change and a deep optimism for a better future.

St Michael's was not directly bombed during the War but suffered from the blast of a flying bomb that demolished the Arts College in the Bath Road. This meant several stained-glass windows in the church were blown out and destroyed, including the East window.

The original window was, by all accounts, a magnificent, colourful depiction of the vision of Heaven given in Revelation chapter 4. It had been given in 1887 by the first Vicar's sister in memory of their sister, an Anglican nun, Sister Maria of the St Peter's Community in Kilburn. It was designed and made by Daniel Bell and featured Christ enthroned in majesty surrounded by the nine ranks of the angelic host; a rainbow encircling the Throne; the twenty-four elders worshipping; and the symbols of the four Evangelists. This is the only picture we have of it.



A new East window was obviously needed and was installed in 1952, the work of Lawrence Lee using a preliminary design of Martin Travers, a pre-eminent church artist of the Anglo Catholic movement, who died in 1948. Travers had lived for a while in the Bath Road, during which time he designed the St Michael window in the 'All Souls Chapel'.

Coming out of the war-torn years and in a period of post-war austerity, the congregation had decided on a window that proclaimed the eternal presence of Christ with His people. This window is, like its predecessor, a vision of Heaven, but one that is very much connected with the world.

At the centre is Christ the Eternal High Priest from whom flows the seven sacraments, through which the Risen and Ascended Christ makes Himself known today. He is flanked by the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Michael the Archangel and above Him, the dove of the Holy Spirit and the guiding, blessing hand of God the Father.

Over the next two weeks, we will contemplate the themes of this East window which arose from the scars of a devastated community as a sign of hope for all to see.

Meditation

Christian Hope is that God is faithful. In the Scriptures, God makes Himself known by calling human beings to enter into a relationship with Him. It is called a 'covenant' relationship, and this is the meaning of the word 'Testament'. The Hebrew Bible describes God's covenant with His people using two Hebrew words: 'Hesed' (steadfast love) and 'Emeth,' (faithfulness). The basis of the Old Covenant (Testament) was the Ten

Commandments, a sign of God's steadfast loving kindness and faithfulness. The basis of the New Testament is Jesus Christ Himself, as our East window proclaims, God made flesh.

Christian hope does not mean living in the clouds, dreaming of a better life: It is not merely a projection of what we would like to be or do. It leads us instead, to discover seeds of a new world already present today, 'Heaven in the ordinary', because of the identity of our God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christian Hope means first of all discovering in the depths of our own life, the Life that leads us forward. It also means welcoming this Life, as the Blessed Virgin Mary did, by saying a yes which is spoken by our whole being. In the midst of the difficulties of the world, we are to look for those seeds of renewal that God has planted, and which will bear fruit that will last.

In silence, ponder on this verse from Psalm 43:5

'Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.'

Ask God through His Holy Spirit to help you see the seeds of hope and new life all around you and give thanks for these good things.

Prayer

Father,

Thank you that in a world of despair,

You are our Hope.

In a world of darkness,

You are our Light.

In a world of sorrow,

You are our joy. Amen