

Address given at Zoom Evening Prayer on Sunday 14th March 2021

When I was younger, I recall that the Post Office would issue special stamps each year to commemorate significant British anniversaries. They were a disparate collection: one set had the centenary of the TUC matched up with the 50th anniversary of votes for women *and* the 250th of Captain Cook's departure on board the *Endeavour*.

Yet anniversaries *are* special events. At a personal level, they map out for us the duration and, hopefully, the growth of our relationships with those closest to us. At a wider level, they serve to recall significant moments in our national life and history. Recently, these have inevitably focused our thoughts and remembrance on the two World Wars: 2018 gave us the centenary of the First war ending, 2019 was the 80th anniversary of the Second war commencing and last year saw the 75th celebration of VE and VJ days. We have now probably exhausted the significant milestones from those conflicts for a while.

Saints' days are anniversaries too. They fall on the date the saint is known, or believed, to have died and been reborn in glory. Their commemoration encourages us to think about the examples of Christian life and commitment that they showed. Today is the festival of Saint Matilda; you may well ask, who? She was a noblewoman from Saxony and became the wife of the Saxon King Henry the First. Matilda was renowned for founding many convents and monasteries, as well as charitable projects for women. On her death in 968 she was immediately canonised.

Later in the week, as the News Sheet helpfully tells us, we have Saint Patrick, although no grand Paddy Day parades this year, I am sorry to say, because of Covid. We also have Saint Joseph of Nazareth and Saint Cuthbert.

Tomorrow though brings in a more sombre anniversary. It was a year ago that we held our final Eucharist before the lockdown began and Covid restrictions were imposed. A year, then, since we were last able, as the reading from Colossians encourages, to "sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God".

More solemn still will be Tuesday the 23rd of March, when we are asked to mark the anniversary of the first full lockdown with a National Day of Reflection: a minute of silence at noon, the placing of a light in your window at 8pm. Please do join us online for the live-streamed service from Seckford Chapel at 11.30 am. And between 7 and 8pm that evening, St. Mary's Woodbridge will be open for you to light a candle in your private reflection and prayer.

This is a day for remembrance of the over one hundred and twenty-five thousand who have died of Covid in Britain, in just one year. It is an opportunity for all of us to come together to reflect on our collective loss; to show support to those who have been bereaved; and to hope for a brighter future.

In the months ahead, the sad anniversaries will continue for so many people, as they recall birthdays, weddings and the dates on which their loved ones died.

And, though we pray that the darkest days of the pandemic are over, we are all aware that further loss is inevitable during the months ahead. That is why many people are hoping that this date of the 23rd of March becomes a permanent day of commemoration, for communities to stand together, sharing the message of reflection, support and hope.

Who knows, they might in the future even issue a special stamp to mark this day.