



Anglican Catholic Church



## Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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*Dear friends and colleagues,*

The black cope I wore on Good Friday bore the image of a phoenix on the hood. It is a mythological bird, resembling an eagle, that became a symbol of the resurrection in the ancient church. It symbolised hope and a continuity of life after death. When talking about the resurrection and new life we are used to thinking of eggs, butterflies, lilies, even peacocks, as symbols of the resurrection, but we rarely talk about the phoenix.

According to the legend, this bird lived for 500 years and built a nest of twigs and spices. After 500 years, the sun's hot rays set the nest alight, but instead of trying to smother the flames, the phoenix would fan the flames with its wings, burning itself up in the fire. With a renewed and refreshed body it would rise from the ashes. In Christian art, the resurrected phoenix became a popular symbol of Christ's bodily resurrection from the grave and for the resurrection of believers. The phoenix sums up the Easter message perfectly. Jesus gave up His life and from the grave He was raised to life again on the third day. New life rises from the ashes of death.



**From the Archdeacon's desk**

Our Diocese has had something of a “phoenix experience” in recent weeks, with losses, but, as when a heathland fire has burned itself out, strong new shoots of fresh growth appear in the ashes. At Easter we are celebrating Christ's victory over the grave, the gift of eternal life for all who believe in Jesus. At Easter we are reminded that Jesus has defeated the last and greatest enemy of all – death. He has made it possible for us to pass from this life, to the joy and bliss of eternal life with Him in heaven. In the place of death, there is new life, a life with a new, glorious, refreshed body, just like the phoenix as it rose from the ashes.

Easter is about a daily rising to new life. Every day, like the phoenix, we rise from the ashes of sin and guilt and are refreshed and renewed by our living Lord and Saviour with His forgiveness, and are reassured that He still loves us and will continue to give us the strength we need. Every day we find ourselves in ashes, some of our own making – temptation, selfishness, impatience, unkindness, a lack of self-control, being cantankerous, gossipmongering, and a lack of commitment and loyalty, and some we have no control over – sickness, natural disasters, war and death.

Christ has made it possible for us to rise like the phoenix out of these soul-destroying ashes to a new life with hope and peace and joy – with the strength and courage and boldness that comes from knowing that the risen and all-powerful Lord is by our side.

Easter enables any of us to rise above the ashes with Christ and be victorious even when life is dishing up its worst. The living Christ makes it possible for anyone to rise above the ashes of trouble and death.

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## Gossip and the rumour mill – doing Satan’s work for him

The spreading of false rumours and gossip hurts a Church. Being honest, all Christians must admit that at one time or another we have (maybe unintentionally) spread rumours. It might be done innocently without malicious intent, among just a few close friends. What may start off as a somewhat innocent statement can fast become something else as others down the line add a little spin and twist when passing it on to the next person. Sometimes the spin and twist is malicious and intentional right from the very start – meant to manipulate, destroy a reputation, or craftily bring someone’s integrity into question. Plenty of that has taken place in our Diocese over the years, and especially in recent times! Spreading gossip and rumours is a major tool of the devil. I shall have more to say about that in the next ACC-UK.

Christians have very likely, in sermons, heard it said that it is wrong to spread rumours and gossip. Do we take the subject seriously? Especially those who ought to know better?

The Bible is absolutely clear on the matter. Rumours and gossip are sinful and do tremendous damage to the ministry and work of the Church. Here are some quotes about gossip from various translations:

*James 3:5-6* – Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

*John 8:44* – It can be a distorted truth. Thus the Devil is its source.

*1 Corinthians 13:6* – To gossip is to rejoice in evil.

*Proverbs 16:28* – It creates divisions and disturbs the peace.

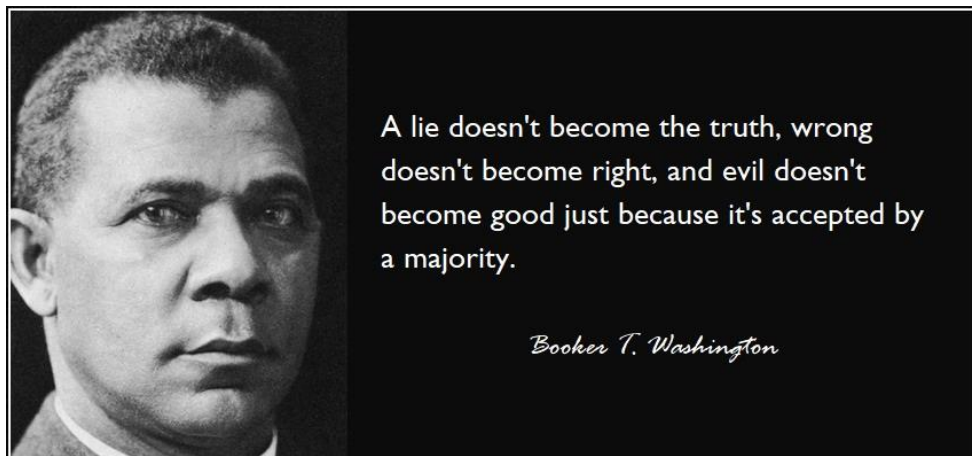
*Romans 1:29* – They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips.

*1 Timothy 5:13* – Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

(Of course the telephone obviates the need for “going about from house to house”!)

Even the life of Jesus was subject to hurtful rumour and gossip. Each of us needs to look deep into our lives and hearts. We need to ask, “Lord, am I a gossip? Am I spreading rumours and gossip because of jealousy, spite, vanity or self-justification? Am I quietly involved in this behind-the-scenes rumour mill? Is my family, my friends, or my church suffering because I am passing along half-truths, distorted facts, lies, rumours and gossip? Have I even manipulated and destabilised susceptible people for my own ends?”

The Bible teaches us that spreading rumours and gossip is sinful. It is particularly harmful to the Church. It is an unhealthy activity that can unnecessarily bring about unjustified harm to Church leadership and the Lord’s mission for the Church. Let’s not do the devil’s work for him.



*(My “desk picture” on the front page shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, or from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)*