

If I may be excused for picking up from yesterday's funeral liturgy at All Saints, what struck me was how deeply moving was the symbolism of first placing Br. Herbert's hat, home-made cross and a rather tattered copy of the Rule of St Benedict on his coffin, and then of addressing a church full of people; the former symbolising the life of a much-loved friend and the latter symbolising the good that God has done through Br. Herbert in Turvey: a church full of people, giving the church building itself its true value, its true meaning, many of whom may not go near a Church otherwise but who nonetheless symbolised God's goodness. It really was All Saints being all saints – the distinctions are ours, not God's, and we are all God's people in this respect; strangers to one another, perhaps, but not to God. How could it be otherwise? But such is the power of law and our privileging of law over charity that we live largely in a world of separation; of carefully delineated distinctions between friend and foe; of who should be allowed in and who should be kept out. And law, in this sense, really reinforces sin: that is, our desire to do our own thing, to have our own way, to be comfortable in our own bubble. It takes the death of a person to reveal the hollowness of this approach: the death of Br. Herbert, the death of Christ. Life is too short, for most of us, to live in such a way, hence the force of those words we've just heard in the gospel:

Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison.

and so on. What we saw yesterday was an amazing mix of people coming to the altar reconciled, albeit, perhaps, only briefly, through their common love of one man: that man who symbolised Christ, who symbolises us before God. Symbols are powerful. We need to heed them while we have time.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour