TOLKIEN'S FAITH

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The topic we have to consider is Tolkien's faith, and there are several reasons why I think it's worth spending an hour looking at such a subject.

First, it's topical. 2023 marks the fiftieth anniversary of his death. To be more precise, 2nd September this year will mark the fiftieth anniversary of his death, and I'm sure, as the date approaches there will be many articles published, news reports, maybe documentaries screened, and in general lots of people talking about this extraordinary man and his incredibly popular writings. Already, the anniversary has been marked by **the Royal Mint** with this new £2 coin, showing King Charles's head of course on one side and, on the other, the monogram of Tolkien's initials – and I'll be saying more about this in a few moments, because the monogram rather surprisingly testifies to an important element in his Catholic faith. I'm involved with plans for a memorial at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. It hasn't been formally approved or announced by the Abbey, so I ask you to keep this *sub rosa* for now, but I am told that the Dean of Westminster is on board and that a memorial will very probably be announced in September and then installed and unveiled by the spring of next year.

Another element of the topicality is this book, ***Tolkien's Faith****: A Spiritual Biography* by Holly Ordway, which will be published in late August by Word on Fire. You know, I'm sure, of Bishop Robert Barron's Word on Fire evangelistic ministry; they have a publishing arm, and an academic imprint within that publishing arm. And this book is a top-notch piece of scholarship, surveying Tolkien's life from a religious point of view, something that previous biographies have almost completely overlooked. Some of you may be familiar with the work of Holly Ordway, a Catholic convert, writer, and Tolkien scholar. She's an American who lives in Wisconsin, but spends enough time in England each year that she's actually a member of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. She's a friend and colleague of mine, and she's given me permission in this talk to quote extensively from her new book, as I've seen it in manuscript and have found it very informative and somewhat spiritually helpful too. Tolkien's example of a Catholic life well lived turned out to be actually rather inspiring once I could see it laid out in detail in all its colour and complexity.

Which brings us to the second reason for spending an hour of our lives today looking at Tolkien and his Catholic faith. There's a lot that hasn't properly been presented about his religious life, and when it's acknowledged and seen in the round, he turns out to be a figure whose story is actually rather encouraging and worth knowing about. Holly's book is certainly not a work of hagiography; it's a "warts and all" presentation. But he did lead a life informed and guided by a profound faith, which I at least find heartening, even galvanizing, and I hope some of you may too.

And even if you yourself have no particular interest in Tolkien and his works, as clergy we ought to recognise how admired he is not only by fellow Catholics but by the culture at large. Tolkien's is a name to conjure with. *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are massively successful and influential stories, both as books and as film adaptations. The recent television series, *The Rings of Power*, that went out recently on Amazon Prime, was the most expensive such series ever made; a second series is due, so I believe, to be released next year. "Follow

the money!" The gazillion dollars invested in this production indicate what a huge audience there is for all things Tolkienian in the secular culture, - and that means, for us clergy, that there is an opportunity here for us from an evangelistic point of view. Tolkien's devout Catholic faith is something we should know about, so we that we can speak intelligently on the topic when openings present themselves in conversation, in youth groups, in our sermons and homilies, in parish newsletters.

So that's the justification for this talk: Tolkien is topical; his story is edifying; it presents an evangelistic opportunity.

Holly's book is a full-length biography, over 500 pages, and there's an enormous amount that could be said. But let's start with this well-known remark:

> ***The Lord of the Rings*** is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision . . .
> I have consciously planned very little; and should chiefly be grateful for having been brought up (since I was eight) in a Faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know.

Now, I'm not going to talk about LOTR, except to emphasize Tolkien's point that it is "of course" a "fundamentally" Catholic work. Let's rather focus on his statement that he has been brought up in the Faith since he was eight years old. **He was eight** when his widowed mother, Mabel, much to the dismay of her relatives, crossed the Tiber. She, like her late husband, Arthur, had been an Anglican. They had had their first-born son, John Ronald Reuel, baptised as an infant in the Anglican cathedral of Bloemfontein, South Africa, which was where they were living when he was born. Arthur died when the boy was four. Mabel moved back to England, to Birmingham, and there for the first eight years of his life, Tolkien received an Anglican upbringing of a pretty high-church variety.

St Philip Neri

Shortly before his twelfth birthday Tolkien was confirmed as a Catholic, at the Birmingham Oratory where the family was now worshipping. He took the name Philip as his confirmation name, after **St Philip Neri**, the "third apostle of Rome" and founder of the Congregation of the Oratory in the 16th century.

The Birmingham Oratory had been founded by John Henry Newman in (I think) 1848, so just a few short years after his conversion. **This photo** taken thirty years later, in 1878, shows Newman front right with some of the fathers of the Birmingham Oratory. Back left is a young priest called Fr Francis Morgan who, in 1904, after Tolkien's mother died from diabetes, became his guardian.

Tolkien said that Fr Francis stepped up with "astonishing charity" to save him and his younger brother, Hilary, when they found themselves orphans and their surviving relatives all Protestants who were not at all happy about their being Catholics. Tolkien once declared that in the course of his life, he had met many priests, "snuffy, stupid, undutiful, conceited, ignorant, hypocritical, lazy, tipsy, hardhearted, cynical, mean, grasping, vulgar, snobbish, and even (at a guess) immoral priests" yet "for me one **Fr Francis outweighs them all**." Tolkien

came to consider Fr. Francis his "second father," recalling into his old age "the sudden miraculous experience" of his "love and care and humour".

From age twelve until nineteen, when he left for his university studies, Tolkien was, as he put it, "virtually a junior inmate of the Oratory house." He would recall that, growing up at the Oratory, he "had the advantage . . . of a 'good Catholic home'—'**in excelsis**.'"

St Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians is known as the 'apostle of joy.' As *The School of St Philip Neri* puts it, he "would always have us cheerful, for he says that melancholy is prejudicial to spirituality." A key characteristic of Oratorian spirituality is therefore a certain levity, with a serious purpose. Philip's beard shaved off. Tolkien said of himself that he had "a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome)." [Give examples: falling downstairs; dressing up as bear; chasing neighbour down road with axe, etc.] This **invitation** to a party at his house shows something of that humour: "Carriages at midnight; ambulances at 2 am; wheelbarrows at 5 am; hearses at daybreak."

As Philip taught, the first remedy against melancholy was "to have a good conscience, wherefore the Saint prescribed the powerful means of a general confession." "I've been in a very bad state. Humphrey came here and told me that I must go to confession and that he would come early on Sunday morning to take me to confession and communion. That's the sort of doctor to have." Regular confession became an important part of Tolkien's spiritual life. As a mature man, he said that "he always liked to go to confession before receiving communion," even inquiring if he would be able to go to confession while visiting friends over a Sunday.

This portrait of St Philip in his shrine at the Birmingham Oratory is topped with the words "Exaltavit humiles" – he has exalted the humble (from the Magnificat). In a letter in which Tolkien discussed his lowly and humble hobbits, he went on to quote these very words (in Latin) from the Magnificat; it was natural for him to think of his fictional creatures in relation to this principle of humility expressed by the Blessed Mother and by St Philip.

Which brings us back to the monogram on **the Royal Mint coin** and on **the spine of his books**. I believe, and Holly Ordway agrees with me (!), that there is a hidden "P" in the design. The J for John, the R for Ronald, the R for Reuel, and the T for Tolkien are all obvious: but is not this a P? The subtle incorporation of his confirmation name into this monogram, is suitable for a saint who placed so much emphasis on humility and humour.

Eucharist

Turning to the Eucharist: writing to his son Michael in 1941, he declared **as follows**:

> "Out of the darkness of my life, so much frustrated, I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament." In another letter, Tolkien recalled that he "fell in love with the Blessed Sacrament from the beginning—and by the mercy of God never have
> fallen out again."

Tolkien considered Christ's "promulgation of the Blessed Sacrament" in John 6 to

be a critically decisive issue: "We must therefore either believe in Him and in what he said and take the consequences; or reject him and take the consequences." To "deny the Blessed Sacrament," Tolkien wrote, is "to call Our Lord a fraud." But to accept it as the Lord's Body and Blood necessarily entails giving it "the prime place" and according it the "most honour." Therefore "he always raised his hat when he passed a church." Writing in 1963, he declared that Pius X had established "the greatest reform of our time" (frequent or daily communion), one that he felt was sorely needed: "I wonder what state the Church would now be but for it."

In that same **letter to Michael**, he said:

> There you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves upon earth, and more than that: Death: by the divine paradox, that which ends life, and demands the surrender of all, and yet by the taste (or foretaste) of which alone can what you seek in your earthly relationships (love, faithfulness, joy) be maintained, or take on that complexion of reality, of eternal endurance, which every man's heart desires.

Blessed Virgin Mary

The Birmingham Oratory is dedicated to Our Lady's **Immaculate Conception** and Tolkien confessed to having a particular devotion to the feast of the Immaculate Conception. For that reason, he also had a keen personal affection for St Bernadette, calling her that "child of grace" who was "nearest his heart." Mary had an important role in his spiritual life. He once told a friend, "I attribute whatever there is of beauty and goodness in my work to the influence of the Holy Mother of God." He reiterated the point in a letter explaining that it was upon "Our Lady" that "all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded." While he was on the front lines, Tolkien wrote a poem in honor of Mary, which begins with the line "O Lady Mother enthroned amid the stars." He gave the poem the title, "Consolatrix Afflictorum" from the Litany of Loreto.

He prayed the Rosary regularly, taking his beads with him when traveling, and when sleeping in a bomb shelter as part of his wartime service as an air-raid warden. **One of his illustrations** for *The Hobbit* even seems to include a visual nod to the rosary. His painting of Hobbiton depicts a tree on a green hill surrounded by a circle of hedges that looks very much like a string of rosary beads.

Tolkien served as a **signals officer** during the Great War. After the war, he went through a barren patch in his faith for a number of years. "Out of wickedness and sloth I almost ceased to practise my religion"—it was a period of years (perhaps as many as ten, perhaps just two or three — we don't know exactly how long) during the 1920s.

St Thomas More

Moving ahead to the 1930s: in 1935, Tolkien's Anglican friend R.W. Chambers, Raymond Chambers, wrote a biography of **Sir Thomas More** that Tolkien read with great appreciation; in fact, he said that despite the busyness of the exam-grading season, he read it twice, "and

shall read it often again," remarking that More himself "must approve with celestial pleasure." Tolkien found the book to be "almost burningly topical"; he evidently felt that the issue of freedom of religious conscience against a coercive state was a distressingly relevant subject.

He also found it "overwhelmingly moving." This is a strong statement. What might account for it? Three reasons suggest themselves.

First, More's loyalty to the Church would have deeply impressed Tolkien, who regarded his own mother as a kind of martyr to the Catholic faith. Chambers makes it clear—as later tellings of the story (such as *A Man for All Seasons*) sometimes soft-pedal—that More was not just a champion of the freedom of individual conscience, he "died for the Papacy, 'suffering death in and for the faith of the Holy Catholic Church.'" It was one thing for Tolkien to say, as he did, that he was "convinced by the Petrine claims": it would be quite another to die for that conviction as Thomas More had done. The moral challenge of More's story to Tolkien, as to any English Catholic, was sharp in the extreme.

Secondly, More's astonishing magnanimity toward his accusers springs vividly out of the transcript of the remarks he made in his own defense at his trial in Westminster Hall. Knowing that he was to be condemned to death, More told the Commissioners of the Court that he had nothing further to add:

> but that like as the blessed apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present, and consented to the death of St. Stephen, and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet be they now both twain holy saints in Heaven, and shall continue there friends for ever, so I verily trust, and shall therefore right heartily pray, that though your Lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in Heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation.

Finally, Chambers's own largeness of heart would surely have struck Tolkien, for **Chambers** was writing as an Anglican yet could find it in himself to say that More's blessing "belongs of right to those of the faith for which he died, and that the rest of us can only have such blessing as poor Esau claimed, who had lost his birthright: 'Hast thou but one blessing: bless me, even me also, oh my father [Genesis 27:38].'" This irenic approach doubtless contributed to the warm and frank way Tolkien responded to the book's author.

Ecumenism

Tolkien goes on to note, in a similarly irenic manner, "the wise words" of his friend and fellow-Inkling Charles Williams, that it is our duty to tend "the accredited and established altar, though the Holy Spirit may send the fire down somewhere else." His admission that God may send his Holy Spirit "somewhere else" is quite a strong affirmation of the Spirit's presence among those who are not members of that communion. As Tolkien goes on to explain, "God cannot be limited (even by his own Foundations) . . . and may use any channel for His grace."

Tolkien believed that "Besides the Sun there may be moonlight (even bright enough to read by)." As he put it, "Even to love Our Lord, and certainly to call him Lord, and God, is a grace, and may bring more grace." It is this view that allowed him to have a deep spiritual friendship, as well as a warm social connection, with non-Catholics like C.S. Lewis (whose conversion to Christianity he was instrumental in helping bring about), Charles Williams and many others. For instance, he recalled that Frederick Wiseman, the president of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, was "one of the most delightful Christian men I have met."

Tolkien effectively held, and expressed, and indeed lived out, the teaching of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism, long before it was issued. The Council taught that "some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too."

In 1967, Tolkien observed, with a certain humour, that "We have prayed endlessly for Christian re-union." How did he envisage this oneness transpiring? The answer is of particular interest to us in the Ordinariate. Tolkien said this: "Speaking institutionally and not of individual souls the channel [of faith] must eventually run back into the ordained course [i.e., the Catholic Church], or run into the sands and perish" [Letters, 339n]. In other words, separated ecclesial communities may freely choose reunion with the Catholic Church; otherwise they must eventually face their own expiration.

Evangelism / Apologetics

In 1963, Michael had written to his father in a discouraged state of mind, his faith evidently shaken by the shortcomings he observed among his fellow teachers and the clergy at Ampleforth College, a Catholic school in Yorkshire. **Tolkien**'s reply gives us one of the few examples of a more direct approach to apologetics in his letters.

He straightforwardly acknowledges that it is reasonable for Michael to be "scandalized" by the failings he observes. From there, he cautions against self-righteousness, pointing out that "all professing Christians" fall short of proper devotion to religion. Most significantly, he says that as he grows older, "I find I become less cynical rather than more—remembering my own sins and follies; and realize that men's hearts are seldom as bad as their words." He gently reminds his son that the danger of paying too much attention to scandal is that "it tends to turn our eyes away from ourselves and our own faults."

Tolkien then sketches out a brief defence is of the historicity of Jesus: he notes that the New Testament is not legendary, but rather consists of historical documents that are "virtually contemporary" with the events they record. His second point is psychological, arguing that the teachings of Jesus, identifying himself with God the Father and declaring that 'he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,' were too shocking to have been invented by the people of the day. His third move is logical, noting that if Christ's claims to be one with God are untrue, then the "only alternative" is that the Gospels feature the "garbled accounts of a

demented megalomaniac." (Essentially, a version of Lewis's famous "Lord / liar / lunatic" trilemma from *Mere Christianity*.)

He advises his son that a badly done Mass can be spiritually helpful, a reminder of the principle of *ex opere operato*. The virtues of the priest and the aesthetic value of the liturgy, though important, are not the main thing. He makes the rather counterintuitive suggestion that his son try to strengthen his faith by going to a Mass celebrated by "a snuffling or gabbling priest" or by "a proud and vulgar friar." This, he says, "will be just the same (or better than that) as a mass said beautifully by a visibly holy man."

But Tolkien goes further in his counterintuitive advice by also advising that his son attend a Mass alongside badly behaved children, badly dressed adults, deliberately rubbing his nose, so to speak, in things that will "affront" his son's "taste": his sense of what is socially and aesthetically appropriate, not because those things don't matter, but because other things matter far more. The point of the matter comes in what Tolkien says next: "Go to Communion *with them*"—that is, he instructs his son to consciously perceive himself as being part of the Body of Christ alongside these irritating fellow believers, not as separate or superior—"and pray for them." It is practical advice on how to perform an act of spiritual charity, pushing back against personal feelings of annoyance, a tendency to be irritated by others that could easily become bitterness or a holier-than-thou attitude.

Perhaps the most significant of Tolkien's evangelizing encounters was with his friend **Raymond Chambers**, a Professor of English at University College London, who was a fellow medievalist and an authority on Thomas More. Chambers considered himself an 'Anglo-Catholic'. He humorously described his religious views in this way: "I am not a papist myself, but an anglo-cat—that is to say, an animal like a hippopotamus, which partakes of the nature of a fish and of a beast, and therefore cannot live on land and dies in the water."

Tolkien was keenly desirous of Chambers taking the final step into the Catholic Church. He expresses himself most fully in a 1935 letter to Chambers praising his new biography, Thomas More:

> **I hope it is not an impertinence** to conclude that I pray ever for your repose in the bosom of magna mater ecclesia [great Mother Church]—the solution of her puzzles is inside not out. But I am speaking in ignorance, and these are doubtless matters on which trespassers are unwelcome. But you would be of greater benefit than I to the ever-losing cause. Forgive this epilogue—but the desire is so intense (that it may not wholly be **suppressed**) that those whom we love and reverence should share in that communion, which is no mere theological word. Without it the closeness of spirit which kindred men may feel across centuries, or across contemporary barriers, is—but a spirit: not incarnate, and therefore, for such is Humanity, not complete. But I speak as a child.

He signed it "yours affectionately, **Ronald Tolkien**"—underscoring the personal and relational aspect of his appeal to Chambers.

Sacred Scripture

Clyde Kilby, the American Evangelical professor, who spent a summer helping the elderly Tolkien with the Silmarillion, recalled that in their conversations, "Every single day he would get on to scriptural things." Kilby recalled that Tolkien also "spoke of his special regard for the Book of Luke"—and for a specific reason: "because that writer included so much about women."

The Westminster Version of the New Testament was published in 1948; it was this edition that Tolkien owned, commented upon, and spent a great deal of time poring over, as attested to both by the marginal notes in his copy and by the tobacco ash spilled from his pipe among its pages.

Tolkien also had a hand in a project to translate the **Jerusalem Bible**, the English version of a popular French translation, which was the brainchild of Alexander Jones.

Tolkien was one of the first people Jones recruited for his team of translators. Jones so greatly admired *The Lord of the Rings* that he wrote to Tolkien explaining that it "made me long to have an English Bible translation from such a hand." Tolkien agreed to translate **the book of Jonah**. After finishing his initial draft, he wrote to one of his grandsons saying "the 'whale'—it's not really said to be a whale but a big fish—is quite unimportant. The real point is that God is much more merciful than 'prophets,' is easily moved by penitence, and won't be dictated to even by high ecclesiastics whom he has himself appointed."

Second Vatican Council

Pope John XXIII, in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, declared, "it is necessary first of all that the Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers; but at the same time she must ever look to the present, to new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world, which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate."

Tolkien followed the Council closely through reports in the press. His friendship with Fr Louis Bouyer, who served as a consultant for the council, also gave him the opportunity to get more first-hand insight into the process and to consider the strengths and weaknesses of those arguing for or against changes on various fronts. To simplify matters, we might describe the council as a debate between the principles of aggiornamento and primitivism. 'Aggiornamento,' 'bringing up to date,' was a term used by John XXIII in his discussion of the aims of the council; his successor, Paul VI, declared that it was the council's "guiding principle."

Tolkien was sceptical about aggiornamento, remarking that it "has its own grave dangers, as has been apparent throughout history." But he was also sceptical about primitivism and in fact spends considerably more time discussing what he calls the "search backwards for 'simplicity' and directness," the attempt to find "primitive Christianity." This approach aims to return to the forms practiced by the earliest Christians or to the basic elements deduced from Scripture, bypassing the ecclesiastical, liturgical, and theological developments of later centuries. Tolkien recognizes that this approach has "some good or at least intelligible motives" but declares that overall it is both "mistaken"

and unattainable. For one thing, he says, even if we could manage to determine exactly what constituted the earliest form of Christian worship, "'primitiveness' is no guarantee of value"—pointing out that "grave abuses" in liturgical behaviour were present from the beginning of the Church, as evidenced by St Paul's letters to the Corinthians, which are full of corrections to the worship habits of those early believers. But more significant in his view is that such an attempt runs counter to the organic life of the Church.

Tolkien's deliberations here issue in a meditation on the nature of the Church, which, he says, "was not intended by Our Lord to . . . remain in perpetual childhood; but to be a living organism (likened to a plant), which develops and changes in externals by the interaction of its bequeathed divine life and history. . . . There is no resemblance between the 'mustardseed' and the full-grown tree."

Tolkien loved trees throughout his life. **This photo**, the last ever taken of him, just a few weeks before his death, shows him next to his favourite tree in the Botanic Gardens at Oxford, a black pine. Expanding on his own arboreal analogy for the life of the Church, he explains that for those living "in the days of its branching growth the Tree is the thing": it must be taken as it is, as a whole, because as a living organism its history "is part of its life, and the history of a divine thing is sacred." The seed from which it began "no longer exists, and the virtue and powers that it had now reside in the Tree." If the keepers of this Tree fixate on the idea that they can return the Tree to its condition as a seedling "when it was (as they imagine) pretty and unafflicted by evils," then they will in fact do great harm, for a mature living creature cannot be made immature once again.

He is not arguing for acceptance of the modern life and liturgical practice of the Church in toto, as if every aspect of it were divinely inspired. Again, in line with Newman, who distinguished between development and corruption, Tolkien says that those who seek the health of the tree must "look after it, according to such wisdom as they possess, prune it, remove cankers, rid it of parasites, and so forth." As a "living organism" that must mature or die, the Church changes in order to remain essentially unchanged.

Tolkien advises "the authorities, the keepers of the Tree" to exercise their surgery "with trepidation, knowing how little their knowledge of growth is!" Pruning is a delicate art. Trim a branch too severely or in the wrong season, and the tree may take a while to recover. And even if the keepers make no mistakes, pruning may cause other problems, may require certain birds to rebuild their nests in different branches if they are to remain living in the tree. This was Tolkien's painful experience with regard to the transition to the vernacular liturgy.

Tolkien spoke Latin. He had total command over the language in a way that was probably distinctive even in his youth, but by his old age was exceptional. Most priests wouldn't have had the command of Latin that Tolkien enjoyed. His attachment to Latin was not in any way an affectation, a merely nostalgic, antiquarian preference, but a love for a tongue that—for him at least—was still a living language.

A glimpse into his attitude about the English liturgy is provided by the young chaplain, Fr Gerard Hanlon, who attended Tolkien during a stay in hospital in 1968:

> I started the service, as we could in those days, in English, to give him Holy Communion and he automatically responded in Latin. So, I stopped halfway through and said, "Excuse me, professor, are you the Emeritus Professor of English?"
> "I am, I am father, yes," he said.
> So, I asked, "Well, why are you speaking Latin?"
> "Because I like to pray to God in Latin."

The encounter was evidently a relaxed one: Hanlon liked Tolkien immensely and recalled this particular incident as "one of the most amusing things in my life." His responses in Latin may have begun at least in part as a protest, but they also came from a lifetime of using Latin in the Mass and in his private prayers.

It's interesting to note that Tolkien was not among the signatories of the so-called 'Agatha Christie indult,' the 1971 petition to preserve the older form of the Mass after the Novus Ordo had come into effect. We don't know whether he was approached and declined to sign or wasn't asked at all. He may well simply have decided to continue what appears to have been a deliberate policy of refraining from public comment about the changes in the liturgy. He wrote letter to the press about other things, but not about this, perhaps operating on the principle "least said, soonest mended".

In his retirement years in Headington, one of the churches that Tolkien attended was **Corpus Christi**, where he also served as an acolyte at Mass and—surprisingly—as a lector. Tolkien had served as an acolyte since he was a boy, but never as a reader, because until 1964, when the Mass was brought into the vernacular, the Scripture lessons could only be read by a priest, deacon, or subdeacon. Having a layman read the Scripture lessons was an innovation, and furthermore one that was directly related to the shift from Latin into English. We don't know how often Tolkien served in this capacity at Corpus Christi, but the fact that he did so at all is highly relevant for gauging his measured response to the change in the liturgy.

Perhaps it was a deliberate act of obedience or humility. Perhaps it indicated that, despite his personal distress at the loss of Latin for the liturgy, he accepted the need for Scripture to be read in English in this new era in which Latin was no longer taught as a second language in the schools, as it had been for so many centuries. In any case, it indicates that Tolkien managed to move beyond mere toleration of the changed liturgy, such that he was willing to participate in it actively. The branch where he had built his nest had been lopped off, but he was prepared to settle elsewhere in the tree.

For all the discomfiture caused by the changes brought about to the Church in his lifetime, he never considered leaving the barque of St. Peter and retreating into a private spirituality. "There is nowhere else to go!" as he exclaimed to his son Michael, echoing the words of St. Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Choppy waters are a common feature of marine travel, and only a landlubber would consider them unacceptable. Tolkien, the now fairly ancient mariner, accepted them, retaining his faithful adherence to the Church he had been a member of since the age of eight:

> "**I think there is nothing to do but to pray**, for the Church, the Vicar of Christ, and for ourselves; and meanwhile to exercise the virtue of loyalty, which indeed only becomes a virtue when one is under pressure to desert it."

And his experiences of the Novus Ordo at St. Anthony's were not merely exercises in dry duty but part of his continuingly heartfelt spiritual life. His biographer Humphrey Carpenter sums it up thus: "even during an English mass in the bare modern church in Headington that he attended during his retirement, where he was sometimes irritated by the singing of the children's choir and the wailing of babies, he would, when receiving communion, experience a profound spiritual joy, a state of contentment that he could reach in no other way."

Reuel

He died in 1973, and his funeral was held at **St Anthony of Padua**, in Headington, Oxford, built in 1960, a building he helped to fund. So many flowers were sent from around the world that they had to be stacked up along the walls outside the church. **He was buried** alongside his wife, Edith, who predeceased him by a couple of years, at Wolvercote cemetery, Oxford.

Then a month or so later, there was a memorial service at Merton College, Oxford, the college where he had been professor of English. The closing hymn was one of John Henry Newman's: "Praise to the Holiest in the Height." This was particularly fitting for Tolkien, whose spirituality had been so deeply formed by the English Oratory that Newman founded. Tolkien's family, in a manner of speaking, was even grafted onto Newman's spiritual family when the cardinal's great-niece became godmother to Tolkien's youngest son. Given that Fr. Francis, Tolkien's guardian and "second father," was one of Newman's spiritual sons at the Birmingham Oratory, it might even be said, without too much of a stretch, that Tolkien was the grandson Newman never had.

I started by talking about his confirmation name, Philip. Let me finish by remarking on his third given name, Reuel, which was particularly significant to him. He shared it with his brother, Hilary, and he gave it to all four of his children—his daughter as well as his three sons—and he pointed out late in life that all of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren bore the name as well. 'Reuel' is an unusual name; Tolkien believed that his father (Arthur Reuel) had been given the name in honour of a friend of his grandfather and that the family thought it French in origin, which he doubted, noting that it appears in the Old Testament as the name of Moses's father-in-law (Exodus 2:17–19; Numbers 10:29). In Hebrew, it means "friend of God."