

## Prayer of the Month • April 2013

**James Russell Woodford**

Thee we adore, O hidden Saviour, thee  
who in thy sacrament dost deign to be;  
both flesh and spirit at thy Presence fail,  
yet here thy Presence we devoutly hail.

O blest memorial of our dying Lord,  
who living Bread to men doth here afford!  
O may our souls for ever feed on thee,  
and thou, O Christ, for ever precious be.

Fountain of gladness, Jesu, Lord and God,  
cleanse us, unclean, with thy most cleansing Blood;  
increase our faith and love, that we may know  
the hope and peace which from thy Presence flow.

O Christ, whom now beneath a veil we see,  
may what we thirst for soon our portion be:  
to gaze on thee unveiled, and see thy face,  
the vision of thy glory and thy grace.



St Thomas Aquinas, 1227-74; tr. J. R. Woodford, 1820-85

This is James Russell Woodford's translation of the hymn 'Adoro te devote, latens Deitas', one of five hymns written by St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) at the request of Pope Urban IV (1261-1264) when he established the new Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264. Woodford's translation, first published in 1850, continues to be printed in modern hymn books. It can be sung to the traditional 13th century plainchant melody, or to a modern tune. Woodford uses the phrases 'hidden Saviour' and 'beneath the veil' to convey the sacramental reality of the consecrated elements hiding and yet disclosing the divine presence. 'May our souls forever feed on thee' conveys this sacramental understanding, seeing the spiritual reality of a material act. There are other translations of the hymn, but J. R. Woodford's remains the most popular.

James Russell Woodford was born on 30 April 1820, and educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge. In 1843 he was ordained deacon, becoming second master in Bishop's College, Bristol, and curate of St John the Baptist, Broad Street, Bristol. In 1845 he was ordained priest and became the first Vicar of Coalpit Heath, a newly established parish with a new church: St Saviour. He stayed there for three years before becoming Vicar of St Mark's, Easton, Bristol, and after a further seven years, Vicar of Kempsford, Gloucestershire. He was one of the eighteen clergy who, in 1856, signed a protest against the condemnation of Archdeacon George Anthony Denison, by Archbishop John Sumner's Court, meeting in Bath, for Denison's pronounced eucharistic views – a decision which was quashed on appeal to the Court of Arches and the Privy Council.

After a further incumbency in Leeds from 1868, Woodford was consecrated in 1873 as Bishop of Ely. He had a considerable impact in Ely, increasing the financial help given to poor parishes and incumbents, and establishing Ely Theological College. Woodford was a noted

musician and compiler of hymns. He is better known as a translator than as an original writer of hymns. In his day he was also renowned as a preacher and was a Select Preacher at Cambridge on several occasions, as well as being an Hon. Chaplain to the Queen (1867). He died at Ely on 24 October 1885.

Colin Lunt