***Memories of The Orthodox Church in Canterbury Road***

It was at the beginning of 2018 that I first entered this wonderful church on Canterbury Road. The community was so welcoming, even though I was late they smiled at me and offered me a seat.

My heart was filled with gratitude. I had left everything behind when I moved to the UK and despite having nothing and nobody in Oxford, I felt happy because I knew God supported me. I found a job and a lovely place to live within a month, and since it was just a few days before lent and I was a Protestant, I was trying to figure out what to offer God to show my gratitude.

Father Ian was preaching. I will never forget his sermon. He was talking about an African tribe and how they catch a monkey. According to his sermon, they dig a deep hole and place a trap on top of it. The hole is filled with some delicious fruit and when the monkey places its hand in the hole to take some of it out, it gets caught. The only way for the monkey to escape would be to let the fruit go, but the monkey - not being the brightest animal - holds onto it and keeps its fist tight until the hunters arrive.

We are quite similar to this monkey. We often ask things from God, but do not realise that we are holding onto plans and wishes which are not from the Lord.  God can only give us something if our hands are open and empty.

After listening to this sermon I realised what I was holding unto and offered it to the Lord as part of my Lenten fast. Within a year I converted to Orthodoxy thanks to the wonderful help of Father Seraphim who showed me what to read, how to pray and answered all my questions about the traditions this Church has kept for thousands of years.

I have always wanted to find the true path that takes me closer to the Lord. I am very grateful God directed me to Canterbury Road.

***Melinda Bende February 2024***