

BULLETINS FOR END OF 2013

29th December 2013 *The Holy Family*

CHRISTMAS

The origin of this word is Old English for "mass /festival of Christ". So Christmas is the Festival of the long-expected Christ (the Messiah) born in a manger in Bethlehem.

The shepherds and, later, the kings come to worship Him. The word "worship" is, again, from Old English and means to recognise the worth of something. The shepherds and the kings fall down and worship the Christ-child: that is, they recognise that He is Emmanuel, a name which means "God-with-us". They recognise and embrace Him for who He really is. Do we? Do we fall on our knees and worship Him? Are we full of reverence and awe, wonder and love? As Catholics we believe Our Lord is as fully present on our altars as He was in Bethlehem: one description of the Mass is that it is "the extension of Bethlehem". We come to worship Him, to recognise Him for who He really is, that is, the Lord "through whom all things were made". When we genuflect, do so with a spirit of awe and wonder. To do so is to find our true place in the world, to find our inner self and to find true peace.

We can know our worship of God is genuine if it leads us to a deeper respect and reverence for one another. So sang the angels at the Birth of our Saviour
"Glory to God in the highest
and peace on earth to those who are God's friends".

The way to Peace in the world is to put God at the heart of all human life, beginning with our own.

Wishing you a blessed Christ-mass,

Fr David Barnes, Rector

15th December 2013

OUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Evergreens have been symbols of immortality since at least Ancient Greece and Rome: so in the dead of winter, evergreens were often brought into the house as signs of life. Christmas trees in Christianity appear around the 15th century - at first in central Germany in public squares, then later in churches.

The Christmas tree in England became fashionable through Prince Albert in the 1840s. The tree was often decked with apples (which have developed into our baubles!): so the tree reminds us of the tree in the Garden of Eden which became a symbol of man's fall from grace and his consequent feeling of alienation from God. The Christmas tree then comes to represent the tree of life, the tree of the Cross, whereby man's reconciliation with God is made possible and eternal life is won for us. The lights remind us that Jesus is the Light of the world. The apples on our tree (not baubles) represent a fruitful life through our being grafted into Christ through our baptism. The wafers/shortbread (which in present times have developed into sweets/ confectionary) represent the bread of the Eucharist whereby Christ

shares His life completely with us. So on our Christmas tree we have these traditional decorations. Gifts surround the foot of the tree, representing the gifts of the three Kings who brought their gifts to the new born King of kings. Understood in this way, the Christmas tree can be a potent symbol to celebrate the love and mercy of God who, while we were still sinners, sent His only Son into the world so that we may no longer live in darkness but have the light of life.

Fr David Barnes, *Rector*

8th December 2013

THE ADVENT WREATH

The circle of the wreath and its evergreen branches represent **eternity**. The four outer candles are the four weeks of Advent, a time of preparation for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Each week another candle is lit, helping us to see the coming of the Light of Christ, culminating in lighting the central candle at the first Mass of Christmas. The first candle (purple) is called the **Prophecy candle** and the candle of hope. The Prophets (especially Isaiah) foretold the coming of Christ, and since God is always faithful to his promises we can live in hope. The second candle (purple) is called the **Bethlehem candle**, and the candle of love. God's love is revealed fully to us in the coming of Christ. The third candle (pink) is called the **Shepherd candle**, and the candle of joy (the angel told the shepherds good news of great joy). This Sunday is often known as **Gaudete Sunday** (the angel said to the shepherds 'Gaudete...Rejoice'). The fourth candle (purple) is known as the **Angels' candle** and represents Peace. The fifth, central candle (white) is called the **Christ candle** and represents the coming of Our Saviour Himself. The Advent wreath is a great help to prepare for the coming of Christ, and to keep Christ at the centre of Christmas. Why not make one for your own home? It will help prepare our hearts with **HOPE, JOY, LOVE and PEACE**. Will we be awake and ready?

Fr David Barnes, *Rector*

1st DECEMBER 2013

POPE FRANCIS has written a letter to the whole church called "THE GOSPEL OF JOY". The following is Archbishop Nichols' introduction to it:

Pope Francis' words are full of the 'Joy of the Gospel', the Exhortation's very title. They are marked throughout by the immediacy of the Holy Father's character and by the profound compassion which shines in all his actions.

This is a papal document with a difference. In it the Pope speaks of his 'dream' (27) and shares a humorous comment (135). But, at another level, it presents a searching examination of conscience for everyone who seeks to be a follower of Christ and for everyone who claims to have the good of society at heart. No one escapes its penetrating questions.

Yet these questions arise not from a burden of guilt but from a joyful heart, a generous heart which, expanded by God's merciful grace (142), seeks to liberate and renew (24). The

document is an exhortation to all of humanity to let our hearts be taken up into the very heart of God (178).

It presents a vision for the pattern of life of the Church present throughout the world, for parish life, for the work of the preacher, for the catechist, for the bishop, for the business person and the politician and for the ministry of the Pope himself. It contains a radical look at the crisis of poverty in our world and the role of economics. It offers a new light of the Church's social teaching and calls for dialogue between faith, reason and science, with our Fellow Christians, with the Jewish community, with other religions and with society, especially in the context of religious freedom.

Indeed a spirit of freedom permeates this text as does the constant call for everyone to enter into the mercy of God and to offer that same mercy and compassion to others without reserve.

Pope Francis proclaims that by baptism we are called to be missionary disciples and that the spirit of our calling springs from this conviction: 'We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never put out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by infinite love.' (265)

This Apostolic Exhortation lays out the enterprise which lies ahead of us all. It is inspiring and presents some of the challenges faced by our world today for 'a Church without frontiers' (210).

+*Vincent Nichols 26 November 2013*

BULLETINS FOR NOVEMBER 2013

24th NOVEMBER 2013

Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King: Youth Sunday

Dear Young Friends,

As you return to your homes, do not be afraid to be generous with Christ, to bear witness to his Gospel.

Jesus Christ is counting on you! The Church is counting on you! The Pope is counting on you!

May Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, always accompany you with her tenderness: "Go and make disciples of all nations."

Pope Francis *Rio 2013*

17th NOVEMBER 2013

PASTORAL LETTER

End of the Year of Faith

My dear brothers and sisters,

Next Sunday is the Feast of Christ the King and marks the end of the Church's Year. The Scripture readings today, then, are all about endings, both our own and the ending of the world, seen through the eyes of faith. The call of the Word of God is clear: do not be frightened; there will be fearful sights but not a hair of your head will be lost; the light of God will shine out with its healing rays. So we face the future with hope for we know that all endings are within the sight of God. even the most distressing. God has shown this to us clearly in the death of Jesus, the only Son of God. who died in agony and isolation. In Jesus, God embraced all our endings and in the Resurrection of Jesus made clear His will that they have a glorious final outcome.

Next Sunday also marks the end of the Year of Faith we have been following at the invitation of Pope Benedict and Pope Francis. This Year of Faith has had two main aims: that we rediscover and deepen the joy of believing and that we recover enthusiasm for sharing that faith with others. The first aim, we might well say, draws on the great strength of Pope Benedict, a graceful teacher of the faith: the second from the impact and priority of Pope Francis, that we get out there and show our faith by the way we live.

I hope that you can look back and recall points of impact of the Year of Faith in your lives. Through the year we pondered first of all faith in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, incarnate of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, the importance of the sacraments, then the practice of the moral life and finally the place of prayer in our daily lives. But now we must look forward.

Next Sunday every Catholic parish in the world will profess its faith, in the Creed, with renewed heart and fresh determination. And what we profess with our words in church we must make clear in our lives in the world. So now we look again at how well we live our faith in every circumstance, how ready we are to stand out by the way we speak and act, not timid about giving an account of our faith, of our love of the Lord, of the place of prayer in our lives, of our commitment to do what is right and just.

Pope Francis has a phrase which describes this call. He says, over and over again, that we are to be 'missionary disciples'. Yes we are disciples, those who wish to follow the Lord. We are his people, the People of God. But with that comes the task of being a missionary. Perhaps we are used to associating the word 'missionary' with overseas, with other countries. But the call of every follower of Jesus is to make his love present in every place, and to issue his invitation to every person.

At the end of Mass next Sunday we shall step out of the church with this fresh imperative ringing in our ears: go and make visible the love and compassion of God you have just celebrated. So what are you going to do?

Think, please, of your home life. What could you do to make faith more visible? A fresh pattern of prayer, shared by all present, before a meal or at the end of the day? Perhaps there could be more visible signs of faith in your home: a crucifix in each room or a statue in a prominent corner. Visitors should be in no doubt that they are entering a Catholic home, best

of all by the way you behave, but also by what they see.

Then please think of your life at work, or in the company you keep outside your home. Can you be someone who is known and respected for being trustworthy? Someone who doesn't gossip but will always have a kind word to say about others? Can you be someone to whom people know they can turn when they are in difficulty, someone prepared to understand and to help? Are you, or could you be, someone who readily offers to say a prayer for a person facing problems? Most people are ready to welcome such an offer. They know that there is more to life than the sum of human efforts, that there is a God who watches over us and can be turned to, even if they are very unsure as to how to do it.

There is so much we can do, so much that is simple yet profound, deeply human yet showing our faith, especially in these times when many are in difficulty. So I urge you to look again at the patterns of your daily living in the light of the Lord's call to be his missionary disciples. As we take so many different pathways in life, look out for those who are burdened, who feel lost, who are, perhaps, walking away from the Church, their hearts downcast. Walk with them. Listen to them. Speak only as little as possible, but from a heart full of compassion. And act in the way in which you speak. This is the way of the Lord, Christ our King. This is the way of faith. This is the way we proclaim afresh the coming of the Kingdom of God in our world today. May God bless you all.

+ Vincent Nichols *Archbishop of Westminster*