



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

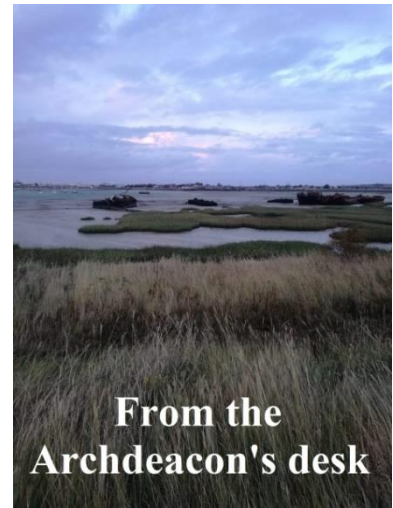
Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

December 2020

My dear friends and colleagues,

About 2,020 years ago God came to earth. God was born as man – that we may live by His Gospel. But, as ever, the human race opted for its own misery over God's promise of redemption. And even at His arrival we refused to make room for Him. Just as we would later shove and mistreat Him on the way to the cross and His death, we shoved and mistreated Him on the way to His birth. Christ was ever pushed aside; uncared for; forced to the margins of society, being born in the filth of that peasant stable.

Fast forward to the present and try to find a real Christmas card. You'll find robins, penguins, elves, trees, puddings, and all sorts of rude ones! But try to find that one true image – the child in a manger. Well, a few budget packs contain half-sacred images, but it's a job to find one that portrays Christ's birth. You have to search them out in charity shops usually. Why is that? How like Bethlehem we have become! A society with no room for God. A society that has driven Christ away, even from the celebration of His own birth. In modern Britain, just as in ancient Bethlehem, Jesus remains unwanted, pushed aside. As God looks down at Christmas time the message from the majority is clear: "Jesus, there is no room for you here."



Could this be why society is so often described as broken? Is this why dysfunction threatens our communities? I don't think it's a coincidence. The more secular we become, the more we seem to decline. So much so that some people say that modern Britain could be described as bankrupt intellectually, morally and theologically, as well as almost financially. She has lost her faith and vision. Sadly, the more we shut God out, the more we unwittingly choose death over life; darkness over light.

Yet, even in the darkest Bethlehem night, hope existed. Those with eyes to see found God in the most extraordinary place – lying in a feeding trough. It is no different today. Walk a short distance from the brightly lit, commercial, shallow, centre of the places where we live. Venture into the undesirable back streets of our towns and cities. And there, in the forgotten corner, where few will even look, a wonderful truth can be revealed to those who want to see it. *God comes down to us.* Dare we fall on our knees? Dare we see beyond the surface of the little porcelain figures in our cribs? Dare we accept the eternal truth of that most sacred night?

It's so easy to miss the point. Many will. It's easy to turn God away from the door to our hearts, just as He was turned away from the door of the inn. It's easy to ignore the meaning of the carols we sing, treating them like nursery rhymes, the tunes of nostalgia. But before you do that, think about this: carols were not written for children – but to describe a living faith. Carols tell of a real Saviour and of His significance to all humanity, including you and me. Who is in the manger? Carols reveal the truth:

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord.

Happy Christmas!

Fr. Raymond Thompson

Archdeacon

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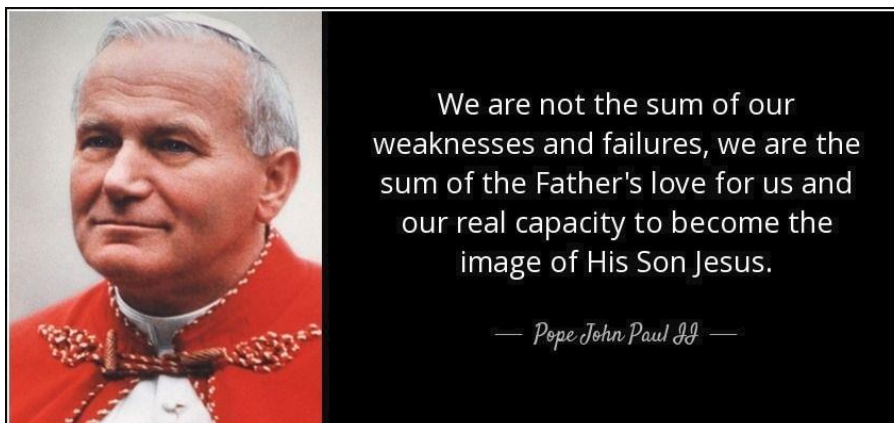
A New Year of Uncertainty – or Hope?

Once again we are at that time when we think about the old year that is coming to its end, and the new year which is about to start. At the beginning of 2020 we had no idea that a deadly world-wide disease would strike the world's population a century after the last pandemic which killed more than 50 million people. As the year comes to a close and a new one begins the effects of what has happened reverberate through the world, and the feelings of insecurity are very much in evidence. People have lost their livelihoods. People have lost loved ones. Children and students have lost education. Governments have racked up mountainous debt. Industries and commerce have had to adapt to new ways of working. There is much apprehension for the future, and we have to wonder if the direction in which we are travelling is right or wise. The under-privileged, as always, have suffered the most.

On top of all that, as we attempt to deal with the ever-present threats of terrorism, how can we keep our country safe? It must be a time for sober reflection and consideration of all the possible consequences of our action or inaction. And of course, we must seek to understand the underlying causes that lead individuals and groups to undertake such desperate and destructive acts, often in the name of religion.

In the comfort of our relative affluence we may easily forget that Jesus was very much involved in promoting social justice, and the gospel message that He proclaimed stressed the importance of the balance of love between God, neighbour and self. In God's kingdom all are equal before Him, and all are held in love. We must wonder to what extent our present economic anxieties, and fears for our safety, are fuelled by the increasing inequality between the rich and the poor in the world. We cannot isolate ourselves from the greater world – modern communications and transport systems make that impossible. The poor of the third world cannot be kept in ignorance of the much higher standard of living we enjoy. Increasing inequality between rich and poor forms a ready breeding ground for envy, and determination to reduce the gap by whatever means are the most effective. We forget at our peril that God's way of the kingdom is the only way of ensuring peace. Military might has never succeeded in the long term in preserving peace in the face of injustice and inequality.

We each have a responsibility to think and to pray about the world in which we live, especially as it learns to live with the fear not only of terrorism but also of a deadly new virus which is probably, we are told, here to stay. I believe that prayer can be a very effective way of seeking God's will, and of learning how He wants each of us to respond, and what He wants us to do and to say. As we pray for a happy, healthy and peaceful new year, may the will of God prevail to bring His peace and love to our troubled world



(My “desk picture” always shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)