

# Christmas Message 2020

Dear all,

The message of Christmas and the life of Christ is at its heart about two things. Firstly the fact that we are not alone; God the creator of all is with us in all we are and will go through. Secondly light shines out in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. 2020 has been an incredibly hard year for us all and we are realising in terms of the pandemic that 2021 will bring more of the same before things improve. We certainly need a bit of Christmas cheer over the next few days, weeks and months in whatever way we can find it.



This is a marathon and not a sprint. In order to make the journey ahead we need to be building up hope and resilience for ourselves and our communities. So how can this be done? Our passage from Luke set for both Christmas day (Ch2 1-20) and the first Sunday after Christmas (Ch 2 15 -21) offers us amongst other things Mary, Jesus' mother 'pondering and treasuring'. In this scene Mary is pondering and treasuring all that was going on and particularly the words of the Shepherds. Pondering and treasuring is characteristic of Mary (as Hillarie pointed out in her reflection on the annunciation last week) and we see this again and again as the gospel unfolds with its twists and turns, difficulties and struggles and ultimately death and resurrection of her son Jesus. At this point Mary is doing what many mothers are seen doing, pondering and treasuring a new born cradled in her arms.

Developing the characteristic of 'Pondering and treasuring' I would suggest is key if we are to build up the hope and resilience that we will need to face the twists and turns, struggles and difficulties of 2021. For when we ponder and treasure we open ourselves up to two fundamental truths. We see that there is light even in the darkest of nights and that we are not alone.

I would like to make a very practical suggestion to help you develop the skills of pondering and treasuring which will build your hope and resilience over the weeks and months of 2021. My suggestion is you make time each day or week to do an Examen.

The examen is one of the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius, the 16th century saint. Ignatius taught that the key to a healthy spirituality was twofold: Finding God in all things and constantly working to gain freedom to cooperate with God's will. The examen is a way of connecting with the presence of God in our lives and discerning the direction in which we should go. The simplest form of the examen consists in asking two questions:

- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?

These questions help us identify moments of consolation – that for which we are most grateful – and desolation – that for which we are least grateful. Ignatius expected that God would speak to us through these moments of deepest feelings and yearnings. He said we should aim to do more of what brings us consolation, and to listen to and respond to what brings us desolation.

Practically speaking find a comfortable chair, light a candle and ask God to help you with your time of reflection. Once you are settled replay the day or week in your mind asking the two questions. For what moment or moments today/ this week am I most grateful? For what moment or

moments today/ this week am I least grateful? You may wish to jot these down in a journal so you can look back and notice patterns over time. Once you have identified these moments ponder them a little and talk to God about what you notice. Ask God for the help you need.

In learning to ponder and treasure our experiences we open ourselves up to spotting moments of light on dark days and seeing we are not alone in our struggles. My prayer this Christmas time is that you grow in your ability to ponder and treasure your experiences this coming year and by doing so you increase in hope and resilience knowing more fully that you are never alone and that light always shines in the darkness.

Peace and Good wishes

Andrew

Christmas Day 2020