



The
12 Days
of Christmas

Christmas

PRAYERS FOR YOU AT HOME THIS CHRISTMAS



Northern Pastoral Network
www.northernpastoral.network



Christmas is a time of homecoming for many of us and this year, more than any other year, our homes will be the focus of our Christmas celebrations. Home is where we first learn about our faith and God's extraordinary love for us. It is this 'domestic church' that we hope to nourish and inspire with this booklet for the twelve days of Christmas.

Our celebration of Christmas 2020 will be very different, but the story and the central meaning has not changed; we still celebrate the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God with us. This assures us that, even in the difficulties and trauma of this pandemic, God is with us.

It may not be possible for all of us to gather in our churches or for carol services as we normally would. No matter what limitations are on public gatherings we can, in our families - the domestic church - experience the true spirit of Christmas, as we pray and reflect on the feasts of the 'twelve days' of Christmas. The great notes struck on the feast of Christmas echo throughout the twelve days that follow.

In our homes this year the crib can have a special focus. Last year Pope Francis published an Apostolic Letter on the meaning and importance of the nativity scene. The Latin title of the letter 'Admirabile Signum' refers to the "enchanted image" of the Christmas crèche (nativity), one that "never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder", writes the Pope. "The depiction of Jesus' birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God". Contemplating the Christmas story is like setting out on a spiritual journey, "drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman." So great is His love for us, writes the Pope, "that He became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with Him"

In concluding his letter Pope Francis made a special appeal: 'Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children, eagerly waiting to set it up. These memories make us all the more conscious of the precious gift received from those who passed on the faith to us. At the same time, they remind us of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren.'

In a calmer celebration of the Christmas season this year, we can, please God, ponder the wonderful mystery of God coming among us.

This booklet provides a series of reflections following the feasts of the twelve days of Christmas. On each of the twelve days you are invited to spend time with scripture, reflection and prayer. You may want to use this booklet in your private prayer or find a time to gather each day with your family.

We pray this Christmas that each of us will rediscover the meaning of Our Lord's Nativity and the great hope that it proclaims for the world. May you have a happy, holy, safe and peaceful Christmas and New Year - **Northern Pastoral Network**

Created and published by the Northern Pastoral Network which comprises: the Archdiocese of Armagh and the Dioceses of Clogher, Derry, Down & Connor, Dromore, Kilmore and Raphoe.

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Friday 25th December The Nativity of Our Lord



Luke 2:15-20

When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

Reflection | Stable of Bethlehem

Space of tenderness, home of hospitality
To an anxious couple in search of shelter
To a new-born child fragile and vulnerable
To poor shepherds on the margins of town and society
To searching Magi, believing in the promise of the star.

As we rejoice in God-with-us
May we become Bethlehem spaces
Open to receiving and embracing
the fragile, the vulnerable, the displaced;
in ourselves, in one another, in our world.

Christmas
Stillness of God, whisper of love
Breath of God, quiet mystery
Light of God, holy wisdom
Shadow of God, birth of mercy

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds
and the worship of the Wise Men.
Close the door of hate and open the door
of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every
gift and every greeting.
Deliver us from evil by the blessings that Christ brings.
May Christmas morning make us
jubilant to be your children
and Christmas evening find us
filled with grateful thoughts,
forgiven and forgiving,
bringing love,
peace and joy to all we meet.

Amen.



Saturday 26th December Saint Stephen's Day

1

Acts 7:55-60

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right side of God. "Look!" he said. "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!" With a loud cry the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!" He said this and died.

Reflection

The transition from the joy of Christmas to the cruelty of martyrdom seems too abrupt and it is a vivid reminder that Jesus came on earth to die. The Greek word from which we derive the English word 'martyr' literally means witness. In celebrating the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr, on this day, we are reminded that Jesus calls His followers to be witnesses, not all called to shed their blood. In contrast to the violence of the Roman Empire into which Jesus was born, we are called to be witnesses to a different kingdom, God's Kingdom, where values of compassion, justice, mercy and kindness reign. Love, including love of enemies, is at the heart of God's kingdom. As Stephen faced death, imitating Jesus, he prayed for his enemies. Stephen was a much loved and respected deacon in the early Church and it was his task to organise meals to feed the poor. In remembrance of Stephen's work, people used to collect money for the poor in small clay boxes during the year. On Saint Stephen's Day, 'Boxing Day', the boxes were broken and the money distributed to the poor.

Prayer

Lord God, we give you thanks for the example of Stephen who looked up to Heaven and prayed for his persecutors. We remember Christians who are persecuted throughout the world today, and all those afflicted because of their faithful witness.

We face many dangers at the present time and we ask you to bless us with the gifts of courage and calmness which Stephen showed in the face of danger. Help us find the generosity of heart to pray for our enemies as Stephen did.

We remember those called to the ministry of the diaconate. Bless them in their work and inspire more people to respond to this calling.

We remember with thanksgiving those who work tirelessly for the poor. Bless and strengthen them in their work.

We humbly, ask you God to help us bring your gentle, joyful, love to our families, our neighbours, our parishes, and the world at this Christmas time.

Amen.

Sunday 27th December Feast of the Holy Family

2

Luke 2:41-52

Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual. When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. His parents did not know this; they thought that he was with the group, so they travelled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends. They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him. On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers. His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you." He answered them, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand his answer. So Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, where he was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favour with God and people.

Reflection

On this Sunday following Christmas we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. Today, the Church encourages us to look to the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for inspiration and encouragement. Family is the place where we learn to love by first being loved ourselves. The family where love is found is a holy family. Holiness is being like God, and God is love. When we are loved, and when we love, we experience God in our lives. We know the Holy Family were not exempt from the hurts and challenges that face all families. They were a poor family who faced daily toil. They would have encountered misunderstanding and gossip from others. They would have encountered the death of loved ones; we know St. Joseph most likely passed away prior to Jesus' public ministry. In today's Scripture reading we see Mary and Joseph as worried parents in a crisis when their son is lost. When he is found they struggle to understand his reply when he is asked why he has done this. Mary devoutly ponders in her heart, and Joseph silently provides for them in strong faith when he fails to understand what Jesus says to him. For the next eighteen years, until he began his public ministry, Jesus lived under their authority. On this feast of the Holy Family, it is good to pray in thanks for our own parents and family. No one's family is perfect. All our family members, including ourselves make mistakes and get things wrong. We have all done and said things that we have later regretted. Regardless of this, we owe our family everything and for this we thank God.

Prayer of Pope Francis to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love, to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division: may all who have been hurt or scandalised find ready comfort and healing. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen.

Monday 28th December Feast of the Holy Innocents

3

Matthew 2:13-16

After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave." Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died. This was done to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, "I called my Son out of Egypt." When Herod realised that the visitors from the East had tricked him, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood who were two years old and younger - this was done in accordance with what he had learned from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared.

Reflection

The Feast of the Holy Innocents is celebrated soon after Christmas Day. The Holy Innocents are innocent victims of King Herod's lust for power, cruelty, and desire to kill the Child Jesus. They are innocent victims of the same cruelty which nailed Jesus to a Cross. We think about the children today who are innocent victims including children whose families are forced to live in poverty or forced to flee their homes.

As people of faith, we are carriers of hope and joy. We believe the promise of 'Emmanuel' - God with us - in sorrows and in celebrations. The infant Jesus, born on that Holy Night when the Heavenly Choir of angels sang, is the Light of the World and conquers its darkness and sorrow.

We find well-springs of hope among all those who live lives of selflessness, generosity, kindness and compassion in their families and communities. They are God's Kingdom builders.

Today we have an opportunity to thank God for His extravagant love; the reason for our hope.

It is also a time to ask God to help us work to create the kind of world He intended; a compassionate, just, merciful and non-violent world.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this Feast of The Holy Innocents, we remember You embraced and placed Your hands upon the little children who came to You, and said: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Look now with fatherly eyes on the innocence of children and their parents' devotion. Bless them this day.

(Parents may sign the forehead of each child with the sign of the cross)

In Your grace and goodness let them grow in faith, longing for You, loving You and keeping Your commandments.

We ask You to help all of us make Your Kingdom come in this world and make our homes, parishes and communities places of compassion and kindness, where no-one is victimised.

Amen

Tuesday 29th December Saint John, Apostle & Evangelist

4

John 20:2-8

She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and saw the linen cloths, but he did not go in. Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there and the cloth which had been around Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed.

Reflection

Saint John, who was able to outrun Peter on their way to the empty tomb, is called, "the beloved disciple" in the Gospel. He was a Galilean, son of Zebedee and brother to Saint James the Greater, both of whom were fishermen. They were called by Jesus to be disciples as they were mending their nets by the Sea of Galilee. Fast forward and we see He was the only one of the apostles who did not forsake Jesus in the final hours of His Passion, and it was to John Jesus entrusted the care of His Holy Mother as He hung dying on the Cross. John was a believer, an apostle, and an Evangelist, the writer of the fourth Gospel, three Epistles and the Book of Revelation. He wrote down his experience, what he had heard and what he had seen as he followed Jesus. He wanted to share his joy in knowing Jesus and enable other people to experience that joy. St. Jerome relates that when St John, as a result of age and weakness, was no longer able to preach to the people, he would be carried to the assembly of the faithful by his disciples, with great difficulty; and every time said to his flock only these words: "My dear children, love one another."

Prayer

Loving God,
today as we recall the life and work of
Saint John the Evangelist,
help us to see the urgency of our call to share the
Good News of God's love, in our families, our parishes
and the world.
May we like Saint John learn how to run in search of you.
By prayer and reflection may we come to understand the
wisdom Saint John taught.

May our lives show that we take to heart the words of Saint
John 'My dear children, love one another'

Amen.



Wednesday 30th December 6th Day of the Christmas Octave

5

Luke 2:36-40

There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshiped God, fasting and praying. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free. When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him.

Reflection

Anna was a prophetess who remained at the temple day and night, worshiping, fasting and praying. Most people would have disregarded Anna as an elderly woman who didn't have much to offer the world because she was a bit religious, always in church praying. It may be that for some of us, our gift to the Church and to the community is to be in the background praying. Our churches and communities need to be held in prayer as they try to navigate the crises of today, including the pandemic. Anna was in the right place at the right time when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, her wisdom enabled her to recognise this tiny baby was the Saviour of the world, and she praised and thanked God. Anna and Simeon, who were present in the temple also, "saw salvation because they were expecting it. They were eyes that were waiting, full of hope". (Pope Francis)

Prayer

Anna, the prophetess, was filled with the spirit of wisdom and hope by the Holy Spirit. We now pray to the Holy Spirit to come to our 21st century troubled world.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come, Spirit of God,
Come with your peace, your power, your light.
Come with forgiveness, courage and hope.

Come now to our suffering world, sick with a virus
and everywhere threatened with silent death,
but most cruelly among your poorest children.

Come to our first responders, our doctors and nurses and
hospital staff, the men and women who preserve the civic
order and protect us from fire and bring us our food.

Come now to the hearts and minds of scientists seeking
a vaccine for the pandemic, to all who support their work,
bringing to it in equal measure patience and commitment.

Comforter, we call you, Counselor,
Consoler, Advocate and Paraclete.

Come to the hearts and minds of
all who seek to walk with those who suffer.

With Your gift, the community of believers
who came to be called Church, was born.
Strengthen us to be working signs for all
humanity to be one, a community of mutual care.

Amen.

(Leo J. O'Sullivan S.J. Abridged)

Thursday 31st December New Year's Eve 2020 7th Day of the Christmas Octave

6

John 1:1-8

The Word was made flesh, and lived among us
In the beginning was the Word:
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being but through him.
All that came to be had life in him
and that life was the light of men,
a light that shines in the dark,
a light that darkness could not
overpower.

Reflection

As we bid farewell to 2020 there is much comfort in the words of today's Scripture which reassure us that Jesus is 'a light that darkness could not overpower'.

Many experienced darkness in the Covid-19 world of 2020. Many families among us are grieving for those who died this year and we share in their sadness. This was the year when the world as we knew it changed utterly and forced us to confront our mortality and vulnerability. We have also witnessed charity and heroism flourishing in the midst of this crisis. Even in difficult times we can find things to be grateful for. Pope Francis has spoken of his gratitude for 'the spontaneous acts of altruism and heroic dedication' shown by so many. He tells us the crisis has shown us that, especially in times of need, we depend on our solidarity with others. "In a new way, it is inviting us to place our lives at the service of others. It should make us aware of global injustice and wake us up to the cry of the poor and of our gravely diseased planet." He says the risk of contagion from a virus should teach us how the "contagion" of love passes from one heart to another. Pope Francis assures us, "Just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Lord will also accompany us in future through His Word and through the breaking of bread in the Eucharist. And He will say to us: "Do not be afraid! For I have overcome death."

We remember another Pope today as this is the feast of St. Sylvester. He was a fourth century Pope whose devout faith so moved his contemporaries, that they publicly honoured him as "confessor" one who, though not suffering martyrdom, lived a life completely given to Christ.

Prayer

God of the approaching New Year, we are walking into mystery. Fill us with hope and an abiding trust that dwells in us amid all our joys and sorrows. God of new beginnings and wonderful surprises, thank you for this gift of a new year. May it be a time of grace, a time to grow in faith and love, a time to renew commitments to following Your Son, Jesus. May it be a year of blessing, a time to cherish family and friends, a time to renew efforts at work, a time to embrace more fully, a time to work for peace and justice.

Walk with us, please, in every day and every hour of this new year, that the light of Christ might shine through us, in spite of our weaknesses and failings. Above all, may we remember this year that we are pilgrims on the sacred path to You.

Amen

Friday 1st January
New Year's Day 2021
Solemnity Mary Mother of God

7

Luke 2:16-18

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said.

Reflection

Today is more than a celebration of a new calendar year. Today we celebrate the Feast of Mary Mother of God. It is an opportunity to honour Mary, the Mother of God, and our mother too, who said "yes" in the name of all of us. Her "yes" enabled God to take flesh in the Person of Jesus, who came as a humble baby who would grow and walk in our midst, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

With grace and courageous faith, Mary cooperated fully with what God asked of her; not just at the Annunciation, but each and every day of her life as she lived out God's plan for her. Difficult though it can be sometimes to believe or accept, God does have a plan for each of us. Can we follow the example of Mary? Can we put our faith, hope and trust in God? Can we ponder and treasure in our hearts all that happens to us?

Mary is often given the title 'Queen of Peace' and today is also World Day of Peace. We know that sadly there are many people and countries suffering because of violence and random acts of terrorism. Some of these acts of violence take place in our own communities and in our own streets. Today we pray to Mary, Mother of God, and Queen of Peace, to help us play our part in breaking down barriers of hate and fear and bring whispers of hope.

Prayer

We pray that in the year ahead we, like Mary, will cooperate with God in the ongoing mission of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Father of Jesus, You who sent Your angels to herald Your Son's coming with cries of peace.

Hear our cry now that Your peace may touch all corners of our world.

You whose Son called all peacemakers blessed,
Help us forge peace in Your name.

Peace among nations. Peace among neighbours.
Peace among families.

When we look back on this time may we recall it as the time we all heard the angels' cry

And worked together to reveal that peace to all.
A peace worthy of God, born into the world.

Amen.

Saturday 2nd January
Saint Basil & Saint Gregory

8

Psalms 97(98):1-4

Mass of the Day - Responsorial Psalm

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God

Sing a new song to the Lord for he has worked wonders. His right hand and his holy arm have brought salvation. (R)

The Lord has made known his salvation; has shown his justice to the nations. He has remembered his truth and love for the house of Israel. (R)

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout to the Lord, all the earth, ring out your joy. (R)

Reflection

On January 2, the Church honours Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, faithful defenders of the Church in difficult times, in the fourth century. They remained faithful disciples to the end of their lives. Our calling is to be faithful disciples today, patient with ourselves and those who share our journey in faith as we are 'discipled into a new way of living deeply and slowly'. The 'Song of the Seed' by Macrina Wiederkehr uses the beautiful analogy of unfolding petals to describe this process:

Life unfolds
a petal at a time, slowly.

The beauty of the process is crippled
when I try to hurry growth.

Life has its inner rhythm
which must be respected.

It cannot be rushed or hurried.

Like daylight stepping out of darkness,
like morning creeping out of night,
life unfolds slowly a petal at a time
like a flower opening to the sun, slowly.

God's call unfolds
a Word at a time, slowly.

A disciple is not made in a hurry.
Slowly I become like the One
to whom I am listening.

Life unfolds
a petal at a time
like you and I
becoming followers of Jesus,
discipled into a new way of living
deeply and slowly.

Be patient with life's unfolding petals.
If you hurry the bud it withers.
If you hurry life it limps.
Each unfolding is a teaching
a movement of grace filled with silent pauses
breath-taking beauty
tears and heartaches.

Life unfolds
a petal at a time
deeply and slowly.



Sunday 3rd January Second Sunday after Christmas

9

John 1:1-5, 9-14

In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out. This was the real light—the light that comes into the world and shines on all people. The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognise him. He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him. Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God’s children. They did not become God’s children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a human father; God himself was their Father. The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s only Son.

Reflection

In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus presented as the Word. In a beautiful poetic way, the writer Saint John brings us to the very beginning of time and reminds us that the Word was there from the beginning. The Word was made flesh and lived among us. This Gospel passage also gives us the assurance that, if we come to know Jesus, we will become children of God.

As Saint John Paul II, wrote, **‘the mystery of the birth of Jesus that took place over 2000 years ago must be lived today and every day. The Word that found a dwelling place in and through Mary comes to knock on our hearts this Christmas and every Christmas, today and every day.’**

We are now His own people, we are the disciples of today.

This Christmas season we are invited again to open our hearts to Him. To accept Him means to respond generously to our call to love in ways that radiate God to the world. This is a call to building community so that everyone is cared for and valued. It means being people who are part of the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God.

Prayer

Christ Has No Body - Saint Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks
Compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world
Yours are the hands
Yours are the feet
Yours are the eyes
You are His body
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Amen.

Monday 4th January

10

John 1:35-42

The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, when he saw Jesus walking by. “There is the Lamb of God!” he said. The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, “What are you looking for?” They answered, “Where do you live, Rabbi?” (This word means ‘Teacher’) “Come and see,” he answered. (It was then about four o’clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him. One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. At once he found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah.” (This word means ‘Christ’) Then he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas.” (This is the same as Peter and means a rock.)

Reflection

In this Scripture passage John the Baptist turns the eyes of his two followers to our Lord. He says to them, “Look, there is the Lamb of God...” They see Jesus and leave John. John had the joy of knowing that he was fulfilling the purpose of his life by pointing others to Christ. In this John gives us a wonderful example. It is so easy to get self-absorbed in this life but we know true Christian love is selfless. True Christian living points others to Jesus. Jesus asks the disciples a simple question, “What are you looking for?” And when they ask him in response, ‘Where do you live?’, Jesus invites them to ‘Come and see’ He extends an invitation to investigate, to take time and to come to their own conclusion. Today Jesus is inviting us to think again about what we are looking for in life. What are our priorities in our family, in our parish and community? Jesus invites us to ‘Come and See’ and to discover for ourselves the mission that He has for each of us.

Prayer

Saint John Henry Newman

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me.
Still, He knows what He is about.

Tuesday 5th January

11

Psalm 99 (100)

Mass of the Day - Responsorial Psalm

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Serve the Lord with gladness.

Come before him, singing for joy. (R)

Know that he, the Lord, is God.

He made us, we belong to him,
we are his people, the sheep of his flock. (R)

Go within his gates, giving thanks.

Enter his courts with songs of praise.

Give thanks to him and bless his name. (R)

Indeed, how good is the Lord,
eternal his merciful love.

He is faithful from age to age. (R)

Reflection

In Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* he invites us not to forget the lessons of history and what we are learning in this time of pandemic.

"God willing, after all this, we will think no longer in terms of "them" and "those", but only "us". If only this may prove not to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing. If only we might keep in mind all those elderly persons who died for lack of respirators, partly as a result of the dismantling, year after year, of healthcare systems. If only this immense sorrow may not prove useless, but enable us to take a step forward towards a new style of life. If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices, beyond the walls that we have erected." (*Fratelli Tutti*, 35)

As we prepare for tomorrow's great Feast of the Epiphany, when we take down the Christmas tree and put away the tinsel, we invite you to reflect on 'The Work of Christmas' composed by Howard Thurman an African American theologian.

The work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

Wednesday 6th January The Epiphany of the Lord

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Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Magi

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him." When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?" "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote: 'Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah; for from you will come a leader who will guide my people Israel.'" So Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: "Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him." And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him. Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

Reflection

The journey of the Wise Men is an exciting story, a story of reading the signs of the times, of guidance on the way. It is a story of delight in finding faith and God, of the intrigue of a greedy and jealous king, and of the good beating the bad when the Wise Men outwit Herod. Pope Francis said, "in order to find Jesus, we also need to take a different route, to follow a different path, His path, the path of humble love. And we have to persevere."

Pope Francis recalled that the Gospel tells us that the Magi, after encountering Jesus, left by a "different road from that of Herod. An alternative route than that of the world, like the road taken by those who surround Jesus at Christmas: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds." For, the Pope said, "only those who leave behind their worldly attachments and undertake a journey find the mystery of God." Each of us has our own personal star guiding us – the star of prayer, love, friendship, support... the star has a different name at different times. Be grateful for your star – and be grateful that you have been a star for others. In the book of God, each of us is a star.

Today as we move away from the manger
of our new-born King and Lord,
let us recommit ourselves to the cause of life
that is the Heart and the Joy of Christmas.