

January 2016

THIS COULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED AT ST. OSBURG:

I'm writing to thank you for supporting the work that has been done at St. Osburg since the Archdiocese of Birmingham handed it over to the Religious Missionary Institute of the Apostles of Jesus. I thank you particularly for responding to the window glazing of the house, it was overdue and necessary. Because of your support I was able to commission the work to start immediately. Double-glazing is completed, but interior work is still being done. In a week or so work will start on the gutters and down pipes. Due to damaged gutters we discovered that water had penetrated into the office floor making the carpet underlay wet and rotten. In our work we were supported by other Christians outside St. Osburgs, they heard about our appeal, some read about it in the newsletter, but the point is they supported us in the sponsor- a-window project. Some special need to be made of Catholic Students of Coventry University who donated £82:00. Christ the King £400, 1 window, St. Anne Willenhall £1184 .00 3 windows, St. Elizabeth £1172.26, 3 windows, St Marys £3438.13, 9 windows, St Osburgs £8601.13, 22 windows! Well done, thanks for your generosity. It was not out of your material abundance that you made these sacrifices but truly out of your poverty. Some pledges were made hopefully they will be honoured. While the job has been completed, the full cost of the windows has not been achieved. There was also some negative criticism of why the windows needed to be done! Priests have lived in that house and they never complained! Another criticism came from the need to fix the gutters and down pipes. Someone asked me do you want to say that you are drowning? Well I have no answer to such questions what I know is that common sense and good management tells me that the work needs doing. Thank you for understanding this too and for giving your support.

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THIS BEHAVIOUR WILL NOT BUILD A PARISH

I'm quite sure we are getting settled again after the Christmas break. We look to 2016 with great hope as a Religious Order takes over our parish of St. Osburgs. It reminds us of the Benedictine Monks. As this year begins, I would like to bring to your attention a behaviour which we must fight. I faced a serious racial abuse in the sacristy by a certain lady (witnessed by two parishioners). She is probably one of those people who never read the newsletter or never listen to the announcements because they leave immediately after Holy Communion. A day after the parish Penitential service, a number of people came for confession. I politely told the lady that : "we had our penitential service the other day, last night it was at Christ the King and that evening it was going to be at All Souls and St. Patrick. "I don't have time because I'm going to visit the sick and housebound of the parish to prepare them for Christmas since they could not come to church for the parish penitential service" Hell broke loose and racial abuses began. I asked the parishioners afterwards whether they knew the lady, but they seemed not to have seen her. An experience was reported to me by some three students; two boys and one girl from Goa (India) who came to the 40th anniversary of Canon Garry's ordination some years ago. During the sign of peace someone told them to leave the church immediately because first they were not invited and second this was not their church! Someone led them to the door! They used to live on Minster Rd just few yards from this church. When they reported this to me, I dismissed it as an isolated incident. They never returned to this church. I feel very sympathetic with the person who "marched the uninvited guests out" at an ordination anniversary and with the woman who took matters in her mouth on a priest! What I know is that such behaviour will not build a parish. Word goes around, the students were greatly upset especially the girl. I don't think they remained silent about it! As we begin a New Year, I put this plainly before you. There are no reserved places in catholic churches. It is not a private members club.

THE MATERIAL THINGS OF THE CHURCH:

Priests and religious are trained to do daily meditation on the word of God. Meditation brings about an examination of conscience and finding a direction in one's life and ministry. If a priest has some responsibilities in the church as most of them do, the mind might wander away or go astray to think about things in his administration other than the word of God. Some thoughts came to me the other day: Why do some people not value the things of the church? For example why do some people not care to close the doors to keep heat in but at their own homes it comes spontaneously? Why do some people switch on electricity lights even when it is clear and a bright day? Why do some people use 4 gallons of water to wash a cup? Why are some people not bothered to spit chewing gum in the church floor but they would never think of doing so in their house? As my mind rambled on I remembered the teaching of Jesus comparing the owner of the sheep and a hired man when the wolf attacks the sheep. According to the teaching of the Lord, the hired man would run away and abandon the sheep, he would care less whether the sheep are safe or not; what would matter to him would be his personal safety (Jn. 10:11-13). The church to which you and I belong is ONE and UNIVERSAL; it is one family. The way I handle church's property here contributes to the welfare of the church somewhere. I have great admiration for those Christians who raise funds for the church, by doing so they teach us that the material welfare of the church is as important as its spiritual welfare. The love of God cannot be separated from the love of the church and the love of the church cannot be separated from the love of the people and all that belongs to the church. It is good to behave as shepherds not as hired men when handling the goods of the church whatever they may be. True membership in the church imposes on us the duty to respect and to carefully use the things that the church possesses. Remember again the reaction of the true shepherd and a hired man when the wolf comes. The prosperity of a parish depends also on the feeling of belongingness that its members have.

THE GOOD WE DO TODAY WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN TOMORROW

Whatever we do either in the community or in the church might seem to go unnoticed but that is not the

case If a person is bent on seeking praise , he/she might feel frustrated and wonder whether anyone is taking notice at all! But there will always be people who do things out of great sense of duty, people who use their gifts to do good. I received a letter during the week written on 9th March 1933 (82 years ago) written by a parish priest thanking his parishioner Paul Burns 1883-1973 for selflessly using his abilities to serve the parish: Dear Paul, he wrote the members of the Rosarian Committee while expressing their appreciation of the work done by you and your wife and Edith, wish me to write and thank you in their name. they are all delighted with the work of restoration , the fittings, the curtains and embroidery. I'm myself more than grateful for the thought and care you have taken to give of your best. I understand and appreciate everything and I feel sure that many blessings will descend upon you for the good service you have rendered in making the tabernacle once more worthy of its Divine Guest. With kindest wishes, yours very sincerely J. Maurus Chisnall OSB. At the time when Mr. Paul Burns and his wife were giving service to this parish they never ever thought that anyone was taking notice. But something amazing has happened that 82 years later we have come to know that they existed and that they spent a lot of their time serving the parish. I can boldly say that they are alive here and now because they got involved in a noble cause namely to support the parish. The 82years old letter leaves us with a soul-searching question "What will I be remembered for in the parish or in the community when I'm gone"? No baptised in the church should remain idle . The good thing we do today may not be noticed but the truth is that it will not be forgotten tomorrow.

FEBRUARY 2016

OLD AGE IS NOT A TIME OF LIFE BUT A QUALITY OF THE MIND:

As I get older I slowly discover that life acquires new meaning. The way I look at life itself and events that shape it, is not as at the time when I was a child or a teenager. You may not believe this but getting old carries with it God's blessings. It is true that getting on in years has its own trials especially in terms of mobility; but there are more things to thank God for than to mourn about. The turbulence of youth is gone with its quarrels, adolescent adjustments, passions and

secret tears. Getting old implies that God has given you the opportunity to bring up your children and possibly to see your children's children; a privilege that can only be achieved in old age. Who would not like to see that? For some of us in the priesthood, growing old has its blessings too; after many years in the ministry, you meet many people preparing for and receiving them in the sacraments; it gives you joy to see them return for those other sacraments received later in life such as marriage or sacred ordination. By the time this takes place a priest has got on in years. In my culture the older you are the more important you become to the community, therefore my family is longing for the time when I will return with evident signs that will show that I'm getting on in years. We never consult children or teenagers on serious matters or on issues of historical importance but the elders. Old age brings stability in life, we cease to look for new friends because the old and tested ones become dearer. Instead of being eager to reform other people by criticizing them, we become more concerned with understand them. Wild dreams are no more, in old age we live more in the present and less in the future. I do not know how many people appreciate getting old these days, the more some work against it, the more frustrating it becomes. However I know that unless we get old there will be no opportunity for us to see your children grow or to see your children's children. These are the things that make us complete in this life. While the outer man may look as if falling apart, the inner man remains strong and youthful. Old age is not a time of life instead it is a quality of the mind.

IT IS ONE OF THE MOST SACRED MOMENTS ON EARTH:

Nations have respect for their national flags to such extent that to trample underfoot a national flag, to burn it or to disfigure it is an abhorrent show of hatred that someone has towards the people of that nation. In my home country Uganda, the national flag is solemnly raised up in all primary and secondary schools during the morning assembly and solemnly lowered in the evening when the schools close. At the hoisting of the flag, pupils and students wherever they are expected to stop whatever they are doing, even men and women going about their business upon finding our national flag either being raised or lowered, they too are expected to stop and wait until it is done. What is a national flag but a cloth but a cloth which defines the

sovereignty of a people. I wish to connect this to what we call the most sacred time in our worship. The time of Consecration at Mass and at the time of Blessing (Benediction) with the Blessed Sacrament are the most sacred times. To remind us that this time is special, the church decided that altar bells are rung so that we may offer worship and adoration to God who is present among us. It is a very special time when every activity should be suspended to let silent adoration and worship reign. The bell which rang at this moment is meant to remind us that this is the time. Some people ignore this time either by walking about or reading books or they are just not bothered! We should not play ignorant of things which are so dear to our faith. I must have mentioned to you that our human eye was not created to see spiritual realities but to see material realities. At the consecration, all that the human eye can see is a piece of bread blessed, broken and distributed; but our spiritual eye sees Jesus the Bread of life - the Living God present among us. I'm quite sure that for those who practice the faith, we know that we are not here to be deceived, to deceive ourselves or to deceive others. The mysteries of our faith are very deep, we should be proud that we believe and to be filled with awe and wonder at those times when the eyes of our faith see God truly present in the mysteries we serve. Any unnecessary movement and noise at this time is a great disturbance to the prayerfulness of the time.

WELCOME FR. JOSEPH KYEYUNE AJ

I'm very pleased this weekend to welcome and to introduce to you Fr. Joseph Kyeyune AJ who has come to join our Mission here in the Archdiocese of Birmingham particularly in Coventry. I had the opportunity to teach in the Major Seminary and to train candidates to the priesthood for 10 years in the Seminary of the Order (the equivalent of Oscott College) in Nairobi— Kenya; I also served as a Vocations Director of the Order for 6 years. It was during that time that a young man by the names of Joseph Kyeyune was received into our formation to be trained as a Missionary priest. The training of a priest takes several years and many of us may wonder why! The calling to the priesthood is a sacred ministry and consecration of one's life to serve God in his people. It is an offering of one's life and all it entails. Fr. Joseph was ordained to the priesthood in 1998, he was parish priest for 13 years in Uganda until he was elected

Regional Superior for that country. When this mission was entrusted to me in September last year, I looked for a priest who would come to minister to us. Fr. Joseph accepted to come and support this mission. He still remains a Regional Superior of Uganda until a successor to him is found. While we are pleased to have a good priest to strengthen us in the faith we must not forget the great sacrifice that his family and the Catholic Christians in Uganda have made to train this man until we receive him among us as a priest. You will hear Fr. Jimmy so often asking you to support the training of a missionary priest, our happiness that we have a priest, is a proof that we need to train another one. Some years ago, I came across some people who were complaining about their priest because he could not speak good English. "The man does not speak English properly" they said "it is disgusting listening to him". As we walked on I asked them to imagine how fluent European missionaries might have been in the local languages of Africa when they went out there! How many of them are fluent in the vernaculars of the people they evangelise? To people who have English as their first language, English is nothing but a vernacular, but a person who can express himself or herself in a 3rd or 4th language deserves admiration. The Holy Bible reminds us to be grateful and to count our blessings. "I gave you a land where you never toiled, you live in towns you never built, you eat now from vineyards and olivegroves you never planted" Jos 24:13, Dt. 6:11. As I have said you will hear me asking you to support us in the training of a missionary priest, it is a need so genuine and serious whose benefits are shared by all the people of God. I'm grateful to those support us to train more priests. Fr. Joseph is one of them.

PLANNING TO BE A SPONSOR KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING"

On the day a man is ordained to the sacred priesthood in the Catholic Church, the bishop puts into his hands a chalice with wine in it covered with a pattern with a big host of altar bread on it (a pattern is the small plate on which the host for consecration is placed). He hands them over to the newly ordained priest saying: Receive from God's people the gifts to be offered to him, know what you are doing and model your life on the mysteries that you celebrate" These words transform the priest into a conscientious servant and minister of the mysteries of faith. They apply to every person too

who comes into the presence of God; he/she ought to know what he/she is doing. As a priest there are some ministries that still make me tremble to the core leaving me wondering whether I'm really qualified! Some of these are acting as God parent or as a sponsor for baptism confirmation The reason I tremble is because of the demands of sponsorship. To be a sponsor is like standing before God and take an oath that you will do whatever it takes to bring the person you're sponsoring into his presence, to make him his saint. Well experience shows that people who choose sponsors and those who accept to be sponsors may not know what they are doing. Someone who does not practice the faith will not bring up somebody into that faith. Someone who has walked away from his family cannot be a credible witness to family life and all the sacrifices it demands. Someone who does not believe in the teaching of the Catholic church cannot be a credible sponsor to somebody who wants to live by the Catholic teaching. To act as a sponsor carries a grave responsibility before God. In the parable of the Talents the master blamed that servant who accepted to take responsibility of one talent but did nothing to make it profitable. "You wicked and lazy servant you should have deposited my money with the bankers and on my return I would have recovered my capital with interest!" Matt 25: 26-30. The master calls him "wicked and lazy. I'm sure many of us will hear that remark at the end of time. When someone asks you to be a sponsor think twice, pray about it; if you accept to do it, remember that it is more than a ceremony with cameras clicking but a great responsibility on your shoulders. God will ask you why you accepted to support someone to become a holy person yet you did not do it. Just as a priest at ordination is challenged by the bishop always to know what he is doing, so are you when you stand in as a sponsor to someone.

March 2016

THE 60 MINUTES OF THE WEEK:

Few months ago, I wrote in disapproval of those who go out of Church before the final blessing. I pointed out the First Mass which we call the Last Supper, one of the Apostles Judas Iscariot walked out soon after Holy Communion; what became of him? We must never behave that way or else we plunge into darkness! During the course of the week someone lamented and said "Father the pastoral letter of the Archbishop

which was read last Sunday spoilt my day.” I asked her what happened, then she said “ I thought the Sunday Mass was going to last between 30 to 45 minutes but the pastoral letter went on and on and the Mass lasted for 1 hour. This is unfair because by the time I reached home my Sunday roast was half way burnt. I’m going to seek compensation from the Archbishop. As I argued to defend His Grace from compensation for matters he did not know , I recalled how important the 60 minutes of the week are to every Christian. God has given us a lot of time to be spent on ourselves but he has also asked us to dedicate some time to him. Are you aware that there are 168 hours in a week or 10,080 minutes! Out of 168 hours in a week God asks us to give 1 hour to him, out of 10080 minutes in a week he wants only 60 minutes to dedicate them to him alone by the celebration of the Sunday Mass; the rest of the time belongs to us! In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked his apostles to keep watch with him at least for ONE hour out of the 24 hours of that day. That hour was special, Jesus wanted the apostles to focus their attention on him. Serious believers will act serious in matters concerning their faith. I know that the Sunday Mass occupies part of our weekly program. I thank you all for including it in your weekly timetable but we need to do it properly by being present at its beginning and being present at its end. When this does not happen, something is missed somewhere. Going back to someone who put her Sunday roast into the oven and rushed to Mass with the hope that the priest would rush it through within 30/45 minutes, I would suggest that the Sunday activities are programmed around the Sunday Mass not the Sunday Mass being programmed around other private activities! The 60 minutes of the week are very important in our Christian life, they lift us up from our temporal material longings to the endless desires whose satisfaction is found only in God. Take these minutes sacred.

WE HAVE NO SECRETS

In the film of Mahatma Gandhi Ben Kingsley starts his crusade against white minority rule over majority black south Africans which resulted into apartheid by declaring “we have no secrets” It was during his first convention in Pretoria. Representatives of colonial powers are visibly present in the scene not to mention the police who stood by, with their batons ready to hit the peaceful crowd calling for equality and freedom.

The reason why Kingsley starts the convention with the words “We have no secrets” is because he was talking about a historical situation known to all; it was not fabricated or an invented myths! There is no time in our Christian calendar that Kingsley’s statement is applicable to us Christians than during this time as we approach Easter. We Christians speak boldly too that “we have no secrets.” The good news proclaimed by the first Christians about Jesus Christ was not his victory, but his humiliation. He was humiliated in the garden of Gethsemane, humiliated before Caiaphas the High priest, humiliated before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate and finally humiliated at Calvary as he died on the cross possibly naked and in public view of everyone! The humility of Jesus was great news for Christians against Adam’s pride in the garden of Eden. These events formed the foundation for the glorification of Jesus by God the Father raising him from the dead. St. Paul writing to the Christians at Philippi reminded them that “Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God instead he emptied himself taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men; and being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death even death on the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him.....Phil2:6-11. As we approach Easter we shall be reminded of the historical events that led to the joy that Easter brings. The first Christians did not make up the Jesus story soft so as to be accepted instead they were adamant to call a spade a spade because that is what it is. I’m quite sure that you have met people who are trying to simplify Christianity denying the “cross” in our life as Christians. Our faith is rooted on history. St. Peter reminds us in his letter, “It was not any cleverly invented myths that we were repeating when we brought you the knowledge of the power and the coming of our lord Jesus Christ” 2Pt. 1:16. Lenten liturgy might scare us and in some cases look like drama, but you know what: it is because that is what happened; we are not ashamed of it, we tell the same story again and again. WE HAVE NO SECRETS.

LET US OBSERVE THESE CHANGES:

I’m pleased to learn from Fr. Joseph Kyeyune that you have received him so well. He has certainly started to find his way about in the city and to the Nursing Care Homes in our parishes which he has visited often. As I mentioned to you earlier in my introduction of Fr.

Joseph to you, I said that he is a good priest who had a great responsibility as a Religious Regional Superior in Uganda. Due to that responsibility Fr. Joseph will travel back to Uganda for handover and possible return to our mission in the future. I'm very grateful to God for sending me Fr. Joseph at the time when I needed him most namely during Holy Week and Easter ; however his departure will challenge us to continue making those pastoral sacrifices to keep our parishes together. Another priest who is supposed to team-up with Fr. Joseph at St. Osburgs Fr. James Natseba will sit for his English Language test in Nairobi on April 2nd after which formal visa application will be submitted for consideration. Someone told me recently that the "absence off the priests is the absence of the church." This statement carries partial truth. The flock will always need a shepherd and the shepherd need a flock to be truly worthy of the name. In the meantime while Fr. Joseph is away, I wish to ask you to do your best to keep our parishes alive in service of charity. Transition time is always difficult and the people who are at the heart of it will need to do some extra work. This will be true for all of us at this time. I wish to make some changes in the pastoral provision between St. Mary's and St. Osburgs which will be effective from 4th April until either when Fr. Joseph returns or Fr. James Natseba will arrive. First all daily Masses at St. Osburgs will continue to be at the same time 12:10pm. At St. Mary's all weekday Masses will be in the mornings. This means that weekday evening Masses will not be possible for the moment. Friday evening Mass will be celebrated on every First Friday of the month after the Hour for Priests. Evening Mass will be celebrated on the last Thursday of the month after prayer to the Divine Mercy. These changes are necessary at the moment to enable the priest to support both parishes until the priests are settled in at St. Osburgs. If there will be a funeral Mass at either churches at a different time of the day, that Mass will serve for that day. It is therefore important that you follow the Mass schedule of the week as indicated in the parish bulletin.

AIM TO BE FOUND DOING YOUR DUTY WHEN THE MASTER COMES

On Friday 4th March 2016 four Sisters of Mother Theresa: Sr Anselm from India, Sr. Margherite and Sr. RegINETTE from Rwanda, Sr. Judith from Kenya two Ethiopian young Christians and the driver of the Sisters were killed in cold blood in Yemen. It was in the early

morning and the Sisters were dressed up in their religious habit for the activities of the day. It was in the morning; with their aprons fastened behind their backs, the Sisters were serving breakfast to their mentally retarded and physically handicapped patients when tragedy struck. Among those they were ministering to, were some aged and dying patients. As the Sisters fed them, they probably thought that each meal could be the last one for the sick people after all they were terminally ill. It was not the last meal for the sick people, instead it was the last act of service the Sisters were doing before they were called to their eternal pay. The gunmen broke in, tied the Sisters' hands behind their backs, made them lie on their bellies and shot them in the heads in the presence of their patients. None of their patients was killed or injured. In the movie of Oscar Romero archbishop of El Salvador, he speaks about the sufferings of the El Salvadorian people which he relates with the crucifixion of Jesus. "Jesus is in you, Jesus is with you, in your suffering he is crucified in you as he was crucified more than 2000 years ago. You are Jesus in the here and now." While the event is dreadful and despicable, it encourages us as Christians always to be found by the Master at our employment. The four Sisters consecrated their life to God to carry out acts of mercy and charity. Thanks to God that when the Master returned at an hour they had not known, he found them at their employment. As we start Holy Week with Palm Sunday Liturgy, our focus will dwell on the Cross of Jesus. But Jesus did not want the Cross to sound strange in our ears or to become an offense when it comes to us, for he said "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross everyday and follow me." The cross can be anyone or anything. As Christians let us be convinced that the call to fidelity will always involve the carrying of the Cross; it is not far from us, it is always with us. What Jesus expects us to do is to take it up daily and follow him.

THIS IS WHAT TRULY CHANGED THE WORLD

The resurrection of Jesus has massive implications. Everybody dies but only One had the power to raise himself from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the linchpin that holds everything together. It is the Christian faith's cornerstone; without which the building collapses. The resurrection of Jesus is what changed the world and gave mankind unending hope. I will not be surprised if you told me that you have come across people who throw doubt on the resurrection. They are not the first. In the early Church when the first Christians especially Paul had preached the gospel about the resurrection and moved on, some spurious preachers descended on Corinth and preached a gospel contrary to Paul's. He fought them not by attacking them but by reminding the Christians of Corinth the gospel he had preached to them. Brothers I want to remind you the gospel I preached, the gospel that you received and in which you are firmly established, because the gospel will save you if you keep believing exactly what I preached to you. Believing anything else will not lead to anything. Now if Christ raised from the dead is what has been preached, how can some of you be saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have been raised and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless; indeed we are shown up as witnesses who have committed perjury before God. Because we swore in evidence before God that he had raised Christ to life. For if the dead are not raised you are still in your sins. And what is more serious, all who have died in Christ have perished. If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people! But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first fruit of all who have fallen asleep.... If this were not true what do people hope to gain by being baptised for the dead (Christ)? If the dead are not going to be raised why be baptised on their behalf? What about ourselves? Why are we living under constant threat? Never give in, never admit defeat, keep on working at the Lord's work always knowing that in the Lord you cannot be labouring in vain. 1Cor. 15. We wish you all a blessed Easter time filled with the love of God. Thank you for your fidelity to the Lord, keep on working and never grow tired of doing what is right knowing that in the Lord you cannot be labouring in vain.

God brings us into this world because he wants us to do something in it no matter how long or how short our life-span lasts for. Some people have made great Saints within a very short lifespan of their existence while others have had to live on and on into ripe old age before accomplishing the work God gave to make them perfect. One such person who had a mission to do, just like anyone of us was Faustina Helena Kowalska who was born in a small village west of Lodz, Poland on August 25, 1905. She was the third of ten children. When she was almost twenty, she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, whose members devote themselves to the care and education of troubled young women. The following year she received her religious habit and was given the name Sister Maria Faustina. In the 1930's, Sister Faustina received from Jesus a message of mercy that she was told to spread throughout the world. She was asked to become the apostle and secretary of God's mercy, a model of how to be merciful to others, and an instrument for reemphasizing God's plan of mercy for the world. Divine Mercy Sunday was instituted in the Catholic Church on the Second Sunday of Easter on April 30, 2000 and decreed on May 5th of that year by Pope Saint John Paul. We must realize that Divine Mercy Feast is a refuge for sinners and not a "party for devotees". It concerns every human creature because we need God's Mercy. The message is nothing new, but is a reminder of what the Church has always taught through scripture and tradition: that God is merciful and forgiving and that we, too, must show mercy and forgiveness. But in the Divine Mercy devotion the message takes on a powerful new focus, calling people to a deeper understanding that God's love is unlimited and available to everyone — especially the greatest sinners. The message of mercy is that God loves us — all of us — no matter how great our sins. He wants us to recognize that His mercy is greater than our sins, so that we will call upon Him with trust, receive His mercy, and let it flow through us to others. Thus, all will come to share His joy. It is a message we can call to mind simply by remembering ABC A — Ask for His Mercy. God wants us to approach Him in prayer constantly, repenting of our sins and asking Him to pour His mercy out upon us and upon the whole world. B — Be merciful. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. He wants us to extend love and forgiveness to others just as He does to us. C — Completely trust in Jesus. God wants us to

know that the graces of His mercy are dependent upon our trust. The more we trust in Jesus, the more we will receive. This Sunday afternoon prayer to the Divine Mercy will be led at St. Mary's and Benedict Jubilee Church of Mercy starting at 2:00pm. Oh Blood and water which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus, as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You.

YOU ARE A SHEPHERD ALL YOU NEED IS TO BECOME A GOOD ONE

On Good Friday someone was deeply upset by Fr. Jimmy that he had not prostrated but instead he led the congregation to the Stations of the Cross to be followed by the liturgy of the Passion of the Lord. "I came to see the priest prostrate as he normally does on Good Friday, instead we are praying the Stations of the Cross. When the priest prostrates, it touches my heart" she said. If until now you do not know why you do what you do in the church or at Mass, it is time to do so. Christian liturgy (Catholic liturgy in particular) is celebrated through signs and symbols, whose aims are to lead us to deeper meaning. The signs and symbols are not ends in themselves but means to lead us somewhere. This Sunday Jesus speaks to us about Sheep and Shepherd, he is not telling us to rush into stables or to climb hills to graze sheep; instead he is talking about a love-relationship between Him as our shepherd and We as his sheep. At the ordination of a priest as on Good Friday the priest lies prostrate, while the litany of the Saints are invoked; Do you know why he lies prostrate instead of sitting him on a chair? I remember one elderly woman who told me before my ordination; "ah, I know that when I will see you lying prostrate before the altar, then I will know that the Bishop has finished you off my son!" This is again a lack of understanding of signs and symbols used in the church. The priest lying prostrate on Good Friday or at ordination invokes the teaching of Jesus about the character of a good shepherd namely that he is ready to lay down his life for his sheep. The priest replicating the image of Christ lies prostrate because the vocation to priesthood evokes death to self so that others may have life. Jesus speaks of himself as the Gate through which the sheep pass. In ancient Israel just as it is today, the shepherd sleeps at the entrance of the cave where the sheep are kept in the night. A wild animal which would dare to attack the sheep will attack the shepherd first because he is lying across the gate. In the same way no sheep will escape to get lost because

the only root of escape was where the shepherd lay. The priest therefore prostrates as the first defender and as first victim. Today is vocation Sunday also known as Good Shepard Sunday, let us look at the vocation of a priest as a calling by Jesus himself to reproduce the pattern of his life among us. If the priest is not doing so, it may be a sign that probably you have not supported him enough by your good example, by prayer and by good advice. We cannot all be called to the priesthood but all of us are called to be shepherds. You too are a shepherd all you need is to become a Good one.

WOULD YOU CONTINUE OR YOU WOULD RUN BACK?

One day while basking in the hot African sun my dad and I noticed that the house of our neighbour was on fire. The animals in that home had also noticed the pending disaster and were calling for help; dogs were barking, cows were mooing and goats were bleating. It was a huge fire indeed each animal was calling loudly in its own language. It was natural instinct to run as fast as we could to put the fire off. I sympathised with my old dad. As we approached the neighbours' house, he looked back at his house and he noticed that it had caught fire too. He did not continue but turned back to put off the fires in his house first. That was the end of his rescue mission. At the moment there is a lot of need which as Christians we have to respond to. Some of our neighbours houses are on fires; think of the refugee crisis, natural disasters and disease. But we must not forget that as a parish our house is on fire too, the fire of huge financial debt. The huge financial debt of St Osburgs will not be solved by strangers or by our neighbours but by ourselves. No single individual will solve it unless he/she wins a lottery. The generosity showed by the parish towards different charities some of which have other sources of funding to carry on their work should not blind us to the fact that the fires in our house are ferocious and that unless we fight hard, the parish can sink beneath the waves. The parish debt at St. Osburgs is coming down thanks to your generosity. My approach so far has been to make alternative provisions for running costs just to keep the deficit low. For example, altar candles which used to cost £60. a month were replaced by oil filled candles which cost £60.00 a year, newsletter printing is done at St. Mary's and more than 3000 miles I have covered between St. Mary's and St. Osburgs

since I took on the parish in September 2015 are not claimed. Fuel and car maintenance is from my pocket. This is a personal effort. I'm sure Fr. Moses would have his story to tell too. Parish debts are not 'ordinary mortgage' as some of us might think. Remember that a parish has huge buildings and other infrastructures more than an ordinary household, therefore its running costs are always higher than an ordinary home. Let us take every opportunity to reduce our parish expenses; close the door, switch off lights, close the taps in the bathroom, support 300 Club, come for our Saturday lunches in the hall. Buy cards from our piety stall, increase your Sunday offering if you can. Are you a tax payer why don't you register with Gift Aid so that for every pound you give to the church we can claim £0.25 back thus making your donation bigger without extra cost to you? God has given us a mission to do here and now, that is why he created us to live at this time to do our best, the rest we leave to God. Remember the story above about my dad's rescue mission. At that moment his home took precedence over his neighbour's

May 2016

WHAT A WONDERFUL GIFT OF AGEING!

Walking into the supermarket in Hillfields last Friday two children from St. Mary's school ran to me and said, "it is your birthday on Sunday." I knew then that Fr. Jimmy turning 50 is indeed the talk of the families and of the town too. Some time last year, I mentioned to you that on 3rd May 2016, I will turn 50. Time goes fast, thanks to God that it does because if time did not fly, we would never have longed for eternal life. Ageing is a blessing from God; there are so many people who are not so lucky. So when God blessed me to turn 50, I went public, like Mary of Nazareth I should say "the Almighty has done great things for me, holy is his name." From now on I have no need to explain myself anymore. I'm accepted for what I'm and as I'm. For people who have never met with tragedy, suffered war or deprivation, life is taken for granted, they are likely to praise the gym where they go to keep fit, or to praise their healthy eating habits; their regular sleep pattern or not missing a small amount of whiskey before going to bed. None of these makes us to live long— God does. I was brought up during the time of Idi

Amin 's rule in Uganda and I grew up in a country whose population was almost wiped out by HIV/AIDS. Many of my age mates died long ago but God has been good to me. He had a plan for me, he wanted to see it through. He has a plan for you too, as you get older be prompt to carry it out. Fr. Jimmy turning fifty is a sure sign that he needs a back-up or even a possible replacement. He is not young anymore, he was once and at that time he dedicated his life in service of others through the church. Try to think of what you too can do to support the work that God called him to do. I have admiration for people who are always active and on the go to do things. It is not because they have much spare time or because they have nothing to do. They are busy just as you are but they give some time to do things for others and for God. From my earliest days I desired to become a priest, because the image of a priest was planted in my life by my parents who always made positive compliments about a man they called a priest. Again some people were not so lucky to know who a priest is especially if the only thing they could hear from their families was the criticism of the priest. Now that I'm 50, I ask you to help me to build that image of a priest spoken about by my parents and after the example of Christ. Please take note of this; your priest has turned 50 he is now semi-retired and he will certainly retire completely very soon! What next? I thank the people who bake cakes and those who buy them to support the training of another priest. What will be the future of your parish when your priest hangs up his boots? If a parish does not have people who are willing to volunteer their time and energy to do some service in the church be sure that that parish is on its final lap to call it a day!

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IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS:

The Catholic Church has long history and experience which stretches over 2000 years. No any other church no matter how popular, influential and noisy it may be on your street has a long history like the Catholic Church. It has had 21 Ecumenical Councils over a period of 2000 years. Ecumenical Councils are assemblies of Patriarchs, Cardinals, presiding Bishops, Abbots, male Superior Generals of Religious Orders and other juridical persons, nominated by the Pope. They meet to discuss matters of faith and Church discipline. The wisdom of the Catholic Church is found in the teaching and decision of its Councils whose validity comes only when they are approved by the Pope. 1. The First Council of Jerusalem was held in

Jerusalem around 50 AD. It was occasioned by the insistence of certain Jewish Christians from Jerusalem that pagans who converted to Christianity obey the Mosaic custom of circumcision. A delegation, led by the apostle Paul and Barnabas, was appointed to confer with the elders of the church in Jerusalem. The apostles were present. 2. The First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) was held in order to bring out the true faith and teaching of the church declaring the divinity of God the Son to be one substance and one nature with that of God the Father as opposed by the heresy of Arius who denied the divine nature of Jesus. African theologians played a principal role in the definition of our faith. Such were Cyril of Alexandria. From this Council we have the Nicene Creed. 3. The First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) upheld the true faith against the Arians but fought Apollinarian and Macedonian heresies which denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. The dogma of the Church about the Holy Spirit was again stated and the words inserted into the Nicene Creed declaring the truth that the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son. 4. The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) dealt with the Motherhood of Mary. It defined the Catholic dogma that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God and presented the teaching of the truth of one human and divine person in Christ. The Council was convened against the heresy of Nestorius. 5. The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) was convened to answer the Eutychian or Monophysite heresy which had denied the two natures in Jesus. It affirmed the doctrine of two natures in Christ; he is truly human and truly divine. 6. The Second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) is sometimes referred to as the Council of the Three Chapters because its chief work was to condemn the writings and teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the erroneous portions in the writings of Theodoret, and the letters of Ibas. It reaffirmed the dogmas stated by the third and fourth General Councils. To be continued...

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE CHURCH THROUGH THE COUNCILS

Last Sunday I wrote about the ecumenical councils of the Catholic Church. The wisdom of the church is found in its teaching through the councils. Since most of them were called to respond to doctrinal and moral crisis, there has not been so much guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church like at such time. We continue with other

councils to help us know that the church has had many trials but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it has passed through them all. Do you ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit? 1. The 3rd Council of Constantinople (A.D. 680) gave the definition of two wills in Christ human and Divine Will against the Monothelite heresy which claimed only one. 2. The 2nd Council of Nicaea (A.D. 757) fought against people who worshiped images. It defined the veneration due to them. We give honour only to those they represent and not to the image itself as such. 3. The 4th Council of Constantinople (A.D. 869) was a disciplinary one called to heal the threat of separation of the Eastern Church from the Western Church. Photius who had imposed himself patriarch was deposed and Ignatius was reinstated. The Greeks refused acknowledge the Council. 4. The 1st Council of the Lateran (A.D. 1123) was the first Council to be held in the West. It took place in the Lateran Cathedral Basilica of Rome. It was convened to confirm the peace between the Church and State and to give final settlement to the problem of Investiture between Emperor Henry V and the Holy See. It was agreed that the Church has all rights to choose and consecrate prelates and invest them, and Church goods were restored to the Church. 5. The 2nd Council of the Lateran (A.D. 1139) took disciplinary action and excommunicated Roger of Sicily who led the anti-pope movement. It made laws against simony, incontinence, group feuding among others. Regulations concerning clerical dress were enacted. 6. The 3rd Council of the Lateran (A.D. 1179) After forty years again the General Council took actions against simony and abuses of the clergy. Also defence of the true teaching was made in answer to the heretics Albigenses and Waldenses. 7. The 4th Council of the Lateran (A.D. 1215) Besides disciplinary action the seventy decrees of this Council answered prevailing heresies, gave pronouncements in favour of the Crusades, prescribed the duty of annual confession and Easter Communion, offered additional definitions on the absolute unity of God, and presented definition of the doctrine of the Church regarding sacraments, and in particular that the bread and wine, by transubstantiation, become the Body and Blood of Christ. The 1st Council of Lyons (A.D. 1245) was called to bring disciplinary action against Emperor Frederick II. He'd issued a circular against the pope and seized church property. In May, 1241, he captured bishops and priests going for a meeting in Rome, and he was threatening the Vatican when Pope Gregory died. To be continued.

THE 21 COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

We conclude our reflection on the Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church and the doctrine they taught. When you hear people criticising you for the faith you hold or the doctrine you cherish, do not be afraid. Many of the so-called Independent, Reformed churches emerged out of heretical movements whose errors were fought against and true doctrine explained through the centuries. No church or political movement has been so persecuted and yet remained strong for 1000's of years like the Catholic church, therefore be proud to be called a Catholic. 1. The 2nd Council of Lyons (A.D. 1274) was called by Pope Gregory X to bring about union between the East and West. It taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. The discipline governing the election of the pope was formulated. 2. The Council of Vienne (A.D. 1311 and 1312) was called to advance the liberation of the Holy Land from Muslim invaders. The doctrinal decrees of the Council were: condemnation that the soul is not "in itself the essentially the form of the human body", that sanctifying grace is infused into the soul at baptism; and denial that a perfect man is not subject to ecclesiastical and civil law. 3. The Council of Constance (A.D. 1414 - 1418) was called to refute heretical teaching of John Huss and Wycliffe. It decreed that Communion under one species was enough to make it understood that the entirety of Jesus is present under both or either species. In transubstantiation bread and wine are changed into the body, blood, soul and Divinity of Christ. 4. The Council of Ferrara-Florence (A.D. 1438 - 1439) was convened to unite the Greeks and other oriental sects with the Latin Rite. It decreed that "the Holy See and the Roman Pontiff hold primacy over all the world; that the Pope is the successor to Peter, Vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church, the Father and teacher of all Christians." 5. The Fifth Council of the Lateran (A.D. 1512 - 1517) It decreed that the Pope has authority over all Councils. It condemned errors regarding the human soul, namely, that the soul with its intellectual power is mortal. 6. The Council of Trent (opened under Pope Paul III in 1545, continued under Pope Julius III, and concluded under Pope Pius IV (A.D. 1563). It defined the doctrine of Original Sin and Justification as opposed to Lutheran errors that faith alone justifies. It explained, the doctrine of the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the sick. Decrees relating to the censorship of books, Christian marriage, Purgatory and Indulgences were

adopted. Refutations against the so called reformers were given and measures of true reform advanced. 7. The First Vatican Council (opened under Pope Pius IX in 1869 and adjourned on October 20, 1870) This General Council was never closed officially, but was suspended. Technically, it continued until it was closed by Pope John XXIII. It decreed the primacy of the pope and of papal infallibility. 8. The Second Vatican Council (opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962, it continued under Pope Paul VI until the end in 1965) Several important constitutions and decrees were promulgated, the most far reaching being the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy.

JUNE 2016

ONCE IT IS GONE IT IS GONE

Some years ago while I was living at Mt. Carmel Parish in Redditch, I came to learn that Longbridge car factory where MG Rover cars were manufactured was not far from where I lived. I felt the desire to go there to see the factory because when I was a boy a man in our little village owned an old car which bore the name MG Rover. One day I visited the factory. The men at the gate did not let me in, I had to have a special clearance they said instead they directed me to the show room to see the finished products. Surprising enough every person who entered the show room was not seen as a tourist but a potential buyer of a MG Rover car! Pointing at one of the cars the man who received me pressed me to buy it at a price which he considered as so good then he said "Once it is gone it is gone". True indeed, the following week the company that manufactured that iconic car went into administration and that was the end of it. "Once it is gone it is gone" Last week in this column, I briefly aired out my concern for my parishioners living with partners in civil unions but whose marriages are not blessed in the church. This might be the reason why some do not receive Holy Communion in spite of their goodness and participation in the activities that build the church. I wish to pick that up again this week. It is very important and necessary for every Catholic to receive Holy Communion. In this Year of Mercy Pope Francis has asked all people and Christians in particular all over the world, to create within them the image of God as a "Merciful Father" this means that while there is no trivial sin that need not to seek pardon for, there is also no big sin that God cannot forgive. Whatever

reason that has kept you away from Holy Communion for many years and which continues to keep you away from the Lord's Supper, this is the time to put it right. St. Paul writing to the Corinthians along similar lines said: "At the favourable time I have listened to you, on the day of salvation I came to your help. Well now is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation" 2Cor. 6:2. I strongly encourage you to go to your priest and talk to him about having your marriage blessed . Do you know that when you share your difficulties with another person the burden is lessened? Sometimes the things we may consider as difficult may not be at all especially now when we are talking about the mercy of God. I don't know when the Jubilee Year of Mercy will be announced in the church again; it might probably not be during my life time ! What a golden chance we have then to put right things that affect our relationship with God and with one another? Therefore I want to take every opportunity to embrace God's Mercy because like the MG Rover Factory Once it is Gone it is Gone.

IT IS NOT MERELY A BUILDING

Last Sunday we witnessed the consecration of the Church of Sacred Heart Parish in Stoke. If you did not turn up, you missed a lifetime opportunity to see the greatness and sacredness of our religion. We Catholics as people of God, we build and worship God in visible buildings; we call them churches. We are taught from earliest time to respect the church building; it is here that God is worshipped and his holy name invoked. A Church building stands as a sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and reflects the Church dwelling in heaven. Buildings destined solely and permanently for assembling the people of God and for carrying out sacred functions cannot be used for other purposes. It is fitting that such a building be consecrated to God with a solemn rite, in accordance with the ancient custom of the Church. As the Rite of consecration was taking place, I was moved to tears of joy as I recalled that my parishes of St. Mary's and St. Osburgs are consecrated. We are privileged to stand in the midst of a consecrated building and around a consecrated altar and call on the name of our God. There are some important questions to ask: Why was Chrism oil lavishly poured on the altar and the bishop himself anointed it? The anointing of the Altar with chrism makes it a symbol of Christ, who, before all others is 'the "Anointed One." The Father anointed him with the

Holy Spirit and constituted him High Priest so that on the altar of his body he might offer the sacrifice of his life for the salvation of all. It is not right to put gifts on the altar other than bread and wine to be offered at Mass. Priests who put offerings of money, poultry, salt , cereals etc on the altar simply show their ignorance of what the altar is meant for. It is not only the altar that is anointed, the walls too! Twelve anointings of the church wall is done all signifying that it is given over entirely and perpetually to God's worship. Why was too much incense burnt on the altar? It was to signify Christ's sacrifice perpetuated in mystery. As smoke rises in the air creating sweet odour so the people's prayers offered here rise up pleasing and acceptable, reaching the throne of God. Why did the deacon go round incensing the church? It was to tell us that from now on this space is dedicated as a house of prayer. The people were incensed first, because they are the living temple in which each faithful member is a spiritual altar. Why was the Altar covered with linen? It was to indicate that the altar is for the Eucharistic sacrifice and the table of the Lord. Around it priests and people celebrate Christ's death and resurrection and partake of his supper. For this reason the altar is prepared as the table of the sacrificial banquet . Let us learn to have great respect for the building we call the church. Going to Mass is a gift of God therefore when you stand here you are standing on a holy ground.

YOU TOO ARE LIVING STONES MAKING A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

In 2004, I went to Argos Store - Mandar Shopping Centre in Wolverhampton to buy a wrist watch. I had had enough trouble with watches as they never lasted no matter how durable they had been advertised to be. This time I wanted to buy the cheapest one I could get in store. In Argos things can get complicated; there seem not to be staff serving customers as customers are engrossed in catalogues looking for bargains. I did not want to waste time, I went straight to the help desk and I asked to be supplied with "the cheapest watch in store" The lady returned with a wrist watch "it is £3:99 she said. I paid the money and I went home with a watch whose service lifespan I thought would not last a week. I deceived myself because that watch has faithfully served me for 12 years. The other day when I woke up , I noticed that the watch had stopped. I took it for repair I was showed a very tiny piece of metal which was worn out and broken That is what had

made the watch to stop working. As I stood there wondering whether my 12 years old watch would get fixed, I visualised the nature of a parish and the Church in general. Our position and individual responsibility in the church might be compared to the wrist watch you are putting on your hand today. In order for it to keep good time each part, however small, must do its work and do it well. If one part stops working, it will slow the watch down or stop it altogether. Each part must do its work and its own work, however when all these separate functions are put together they make up what we call a good watch. This simply illustrates that each member of the parish big or small, young or old native or immigrant who arrived this morning, all of us have responsibilities in the church as a whole and in the local parish to which we belong. I have spent sometime examining and exploring the walls of St. Osburgs church and I asked myself: "were the monks who built the church tired or were they serving a sentence"? From outside the walls of St. Osburg church are made up of rocks thrown here and there such that beauty and strength are not seen at once. But take sometime and you discover that there is something special here; different stones with different shapes and sizes fit into their places and do their work well to support the building. The differences among us create beauty and strength that make a parish vibrant and dynamic. Because we are living stones, you have to play your part. The Church is like the human body, different parts different functions and same healthy body.. Now we don't expect a house to stand for very long if you start taking a brick out here and a brick out there. Each time you take a brick out, the overall structure gets weaker. If you take many bricks out, the structure will fall. We cannot expect the work of the church to go on smoothly and to be successful without you being part of it.

IT WILL ALWAYS BE A STRUGGLE TO DISCOVER THE WILL OF GOD

On Tuesday I learned about the death of Mr. Emmanuel Kakekela (82) a dad to one of our priests who lived in the diocese of Bukoba in Tanzania. He had six sons. I had an encounter with this man which made me to think that his son had a genuine call to the priesthood. When his eldest son wanted to become a priest he put serious objection, only to be persuaded by his wife who thought that priesthood is not a life commitment . She lived in hope that one day the son

will return and live like all other men in the village with wife and children. Unfortunately he did not return but went on to become a priest. Once the dad realised that his son was not going to marry, he became protective of his five remaining sons. At that time the youngest son was doing A'Level at Rubya diocesan Seminary but he could not continue to the Major Seminary because his dad went and took him out after his A'Level examinations. He thought that was the end of it. When I was Vocations Director of our Order, I started to receive nice letters from someone who wanted to become a religious missionary priest. I left Kenya, crossed into Uganda and drove across the border into Tanzania to meet the boy in his home settings. What I did not know was that his dad could not tolerate anything that sounded like any of his other sons becoming a priest. After introducing myself and having thanked the parents for the offer of their son to train for the priesthood, the old man started to interrogate his son and to remind him of how he had gone to the diocesan bishop and stopped him from becoming a priest. "What is this madness that someone had travelled across three countries to come to talk about a subject which was closed long ago? The boy tried to explain to his dad and I too tried to speak to him but all this added to his anger. He stood up and looked around the sitting room as if to find where his machete and stick were. It was at that moment that his son realised that we were in a life-threatening situation; he told me to leave the house immediately. As I was leaving I asked him to lead a prayer which he calmly did. As soon as I stepped out of his house I felt within me a voice telling me to go ahead and recruit the boy into our seminary formation. The more his dad opposed it the more I felt that God was calling the boy. He was ordained 8 years ago to the priesthood. I'm quite sure that he will remember to pray for his dad's soul everyday during the sacrifice of the Mass. Well if you were thinking of becoming a priest, a religious, getting married in the church, serving God, or doing anything that is truly good, you should not think that everybody will approve of it. You might have to struggle, to endure criticism and isolation but the will of God and his plan will always prevail. The opposition of Mr. Emmanuel Kakekela to his son becoming a priest was not because he hated the church or his son, but it was a struggle within himself to do what he thought best for his son. His sons persistence to become a priest was likewise a struggle within himself to fulfil what he thought God was calling him to do.

July 2016

IS VOX POPULI VOX DEI APPLICABLE ALL THE TIME?

There is an old Latin saying “Vox Populi, Vox Dei” meaning the voice of the people is the voice of God. It refers to the idea that when many people express an opinion and uphold it as true, the king or the government ought to pay attention to what the people say. Democracy is normally seen in this context. Two years ago, I had an a discussion with Rev. Christopher the Bishop of Coventry when we were at Oscott College on priest training day. He had been invited by Archbishop Bernard to speak to the Catholic Clergy. The matter at stake was how we can work together. Recalling the fact that we live in a democratic society where “Vox Populi works with what percentage goes into the ballot box, I reminded the bishop how damaging adopting secular behaviour to church’s discipline and doctrine can be very dangerous to Christian cause. Of course if you normally follow the debates in parliament, the majority always have it. This principle cannot and will not always work in the church. Do we believe what we believe as Christians because that is what the majority believe or we believe because that is what it is? The resurrection of Jesus was believed by a tiny group of people, while the majority opposed it. Twenty one centuries ago two men were stood on a balcony; between them was a governor who wield great authority, his word would bring life or death. Below the balcony was a large crowd of people. They were pushing each other because they wanted to have a glimpse of the two men. Above all they wanted their voice to be heard. Every person in the crowd knew the truth about the men who stood chained there. One man had given them life, the other man had robbed them and murdered some. About the man who had given them life and showed them love the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, cried out all at once, “Crucify him, crucify him!” The governor was at loss, the voice of the people grew louder and louder. The governor with all the best intentions to do something for one of the condemned man could not make headway, the people had spoken Vox Populi vox Dei principle cannot be applicable all the time. There are many cases where the voice of the people can be misled especially when what they are giving their say upon is not well explained or when much deception is at play. There will always be people who manipulate the voice of the masses, often time leading to miseries. Mob justice as we know claims many lives all over the world, in the

end it is not justice at all. At one time Jesus was presented with a victim of voice of the people, she was allegedly caught in adultery. While the voice of the people demanded her condemnation to death by stoning, Jesus refused to listen to Vox Populi principle and instead made the people to realise the injustice of ill informed voice of the people.

THEY PRAISED GOD FOR GIVING SUCH POWER TO MEN:

I don’t know what reaction the people will give upon hearing of new scientific progress that has been achieved by man. 5 years ago a scientific venture was initiated from Californian desert USA, destination was Jupiter the largest planet in our solar system with hostile radiation fumes, as scientists say. After a five-year voyage across 1.8bn miles (2.8bn km), Nasa’s Juno spacecraft reached Jupiter and successfully entered its orbit. Braving intense radiation and a field of space rocks, the probe inched into the orbit of the largest planet in the solar system on 4th July 2016 at 03.18 GMT. Cheers in Nasa control room as Juno entered the planned orbit of Jupiter could be noticed across the scientific world. Barely 10 years ago no one ever thought that such a thing could happen. Whatever Juno will send down to earth will be another marvel hopefully to increase our faith. The gospel of Matthew 9:1-8 talks about Jesus curing a severely paralysed man. Once the man was well and walked home “the people were filled with awe and praised God for giving such power to men” Jesus was seen as one of them, yet for such a man of their rank to do great things was seen as God’s work in him. He had received delegated authority, a “power given to men by God” What will the attitude be of the people of our generation upon the increasing discoveries of science; will they marvel and praise God for such intelligence he has given to man, or man will be filled with pride to deny the existence of God! All Things Bright and Beautiful is an Anglican hymn, also popular with other Christian denominations. The beautiful words by Cecil Frances Alexander were first published in her Hymns for Little Children. In it she demonstrates how God takes care of everything even the minute of creatures. All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful, he Lord God made them all. Each little flower that opens, Each little bird that sings, He made their glowing colours, He made their tiny wings. The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his

gate, God made them high and lowly, And ordered their estate. He gave us eyes to see them, And lips that we might tell, How great is God Almighty, Who has made all things well. The coming of science is a sure hope that God wants people of this generation to know him more and more. Every time something new is discovered or achieved it encourages me to marvel, and to know how much more I need to know God who has made them all.

GIVE YOUR CHILD A POSITIVE BUILD UP AND YOU WILL NEVER REGRET IT

Last Saturday at St. Mary's Parish the parish choir put on a Songs of praise concert to raise money for the training of a missionary priest. This is in response to the fact that the number of priests in the Church is going down particularly in England. If a missionary priest is trained he will be deployed by his superiors to any country or to any diocese where the need of a priest is urgent. Three parishes in Coventry are ministered to by Missionary priests, namely St. Osburgs, St. Mary's and St. Elizabeth. What could happen to our parish or to our Mass times today if we did not have these missionary priests here! Vocation grows out of good family habits, but good family habits are also founded on positive family faith traditions. It does not take much time for a baby to discover his/ her mother tongue; the reason is simple; the mother tongue is the family habitual means of communication. A baby born in the family is exposed to this habit every time therefore it comes naturally that he/she should pick up the mom's language. It does not take long before the child speaks the language. It does not surprise us either but it would make us puzzled if instead of the child speaking our mother's language was to speak an alien dialect. If a family has good habits of practicing the Catholic Faith there is hope that children will pick up the practice. I'm imagining a scenario where parents stop practising the faith, the children by doing so are likely to lack someone to go with to church or to introduce them into the sacramental life of the church. The result of this is that the whole family will stop practising the faith. Good examples and education that children receive at home usually make greater impression on their life than formal education. If a child was brought up in an environment of good example, hard work and honest living, this will form the backbone of his/her life no matter how dishonest the environment they may find

themselves in as adults. I have great admiration for parents who act as mentors to their children. Last Sunday the daughter of our parish choir mistress at St. Marys conducted an orchestra with an artistry which would not be expected of a child of her age. Where did the child get all that skill? It was of course from her mother, she sees her conducting music and singing in the choir. It is natural that at the age of seven the girl feels competent enough to stand before hundreds of people to conduct an orchestra just like her mother. Give your child a positive build up of faith and character from the start and you will never regret it. No one has ever succeeded to get rid of a mother tongue, it was the first positive thing we learned from our parents. Just as you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, it will be difficult to teach children to acquire good manners when they get older.

IF THIS IS WHAT MY PARENTS DID FOR ME, WOE TO ME IF I DON'T RESPECT THEM

During the week, I visited a family recently blessed with a baby. What a wonderful feeling to see a new baby and how much a baby means in the life of a loving couple. That tiny soul is the determining factor of the family's activity. The parents are very close, minding each and every moment of the baby. The dad told me that the baby is very active in the night; although she seemed to be fully asleep at the time of my visit. Once midnight sets in, she wakes up, plays a lot and longs for the mom's breast. I'm quite sure that all of us without exception kept our parents awake through the night at one point or the other, but very few of us ever remember to pay back in thanksgiving for what they did for us. I'm not talking about giving them money, taking them on expensive holidays or showing them the big academic papers we have achieved which some of them never dreamed of getting. I'm talking about giving a parent due respect, true obedience, availability and loving engagement with an ageing parent. The Holy Bible is categorical in demanding that we honour our parents. In the hierarchy of the Ten Commandments parents are second to God since after the first three commandments which talk about God, the 4th commandment talks about the parents (Ex 20:12) . Honouring parents is the only commandment in bible that promises long life as a reward. Those who honour their parents are blessed (Jer 35:18-19). In contrast, those with a "depraved mind" and those who exhibit ungodliness are characterized by disobedience

to parents (Rom 1:30; 2Tim 3:2). A good number of people including teachers in schools are amazed by disrespect some children have towards their superiors. Much of this is learned in the home especially if contempt and negative criticisms are common in family conversations. As children mature, the obedience that they learned encouraged and demanded by their parents serves them well in honouring other authorities such as the authority of the church, government, the police, and employers. The promise of a long life is the pledge of God's lifelong protection, guidance, deliverance and provision. Surely, there is hardly anything more precious than living in a loving relationship with your parents. In fact, you did not choose your parents. God did. And His design is for you to live your entire life in a continual state of honour and blessing. "Long life comes to him who honours his father, he who sets his mother at ease is showing obedience to the Lord. Support your father in his old age, do not grieve him during his life. Even if his mind should fail, show him sympathy, do not despise him in your health and strength, for kindness to a father shall not be forgotten. The man who deserts his father is no better than a blasphemer and who ever angers his mother is accursed of the Lord." Sirach 3:1-18.

August 2016

VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ENVIRONMENT LEADS TO SELF DESTRUCTION :

We woke up on Tuesday morning just to learn about the murder of Father Jacques Hamel, an 84 year old priest who was killed in France as he celebrated the Holy Mass. None of us can fully explain why an innocent holy man neither interested in politics nor in the subjugation of nations would be brutally killed by people who would have looked at him as their great grand father. The Christian Hebrew Bible tells us "Thou Shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13) but it does not go on to elaborate. This is to show the seriousness of taking life, it does not matter whether it is the life of an enemy, a stranger or of a friend, the point is "Thou shall not kill". The violence which is taking root in many societies calls on us to re-examine ourselves, by looking into those areas of our life where we have not truly responded to the call for peace. A simple word can change the situation for better or for worse. Violence, hate, love, truth etc.. are not inborn, they are learned and if they are learned, it means that someone either directly or

indirectly acts as a mentor. Few days ago, I was walking through some alleyways of the parish. I could not believe my eyes to see the amount of rubbish that is found in some corners. Among the things thrown everywhere were fridges, sofa sets, beds and blankets. There were plastic toy guns, pistols and rifles perhaps reflecting the dangerous upbringing that some families introduce their children to from the very start, which can potentially lead to a criminal lifestyle. As I looked at the sofas and fridges thrown about, some thoughts came to my mind; 'at school teachers tell the children to keep clean and to ensure that rubbish is disposed off carefully. Surely children see their family furniture and beddings all over the place disposed off by their parents without respect of the environment. what do you think they will do?' The words of the teacher to keep tidy are rendered useless! When a bad example is set by someone you uphold in honour, it has far reaching impact than if it is done by an equal. When I was growing up, my parents used to tell me to behave myself and to live in such a way that I can look back at the course my life took and say 'that is me'! Do you feel concerned about what you would like to hear people speak about you when you are gone? Would you feel comfortable if the movie of your life was played a second time? It is therefore important that a person conducts oneself with self respect intent to give good example to others. During this long holiday parents will spend more time with their children, it is the best time to help your children to acquire those human values that will make you feel proud of them as they grow up. A well behaved child is the cause of pride and joy to the family, a badly behaved child ruins it. If we want our children to live in a better world it is our duty to train them by setting good example at all time.

"IT WAS ONLY FIVE MINUTES FATHER":

When I was growing up a friend of mine persuaded me to join the army. The benefits of being a soldier are many he said 'respect, being feared and never running short of money'. I told him that I desired to be a priest. He said that I was condemning myself to a life of poverty loneliness and constant transfers by the bishop as if I had no will of my own. I too reminded him of the risky nature of being a soldier including the possibility of losing his life at the violent hand of the enemy. He joined the army, I went for the priesthood, but the choices we had made influenced our orientation of life

and discipline. Some people have no sense of self discipline in order to cope with the demands of life and of work. The other day someone came to my door lamenting that he had lost a very good job I had recommended him for recently. He made all sorts of accusations against everyone he could think of. Everybody is against me he said, why do I lose every job I get? In the course of my trying to console him, I asked him at what time he reported for work. He told me that he had been late for five minutes on several occasions. Did anybody comment about your being late? Yes he said, my line manager had warned me once, but on this occasion I was late only for four minutes when the manager dismissed me. He is not a patient man." he said. In many cases we are our own enemies, we promote or demote ourselves. The choices we make and the lifestyle we live will have influence on the kind of destiny we shall have. People who have formed a habit of being late, either for work or for Sunday Mass, or for a family get together will stand on the losing end of every opportunity. Life demands discipline, you cannot be an employee and behave as if you are the owner of the company. For someone to lose a full time job with a good pay within two months, is not a joke. Many people do not realise that those few mischiefs here and there add up. An employee who isn't working when he's supposed to causes loss in productivity. Routine interruption may throw other employees off, particularly if they have to rely on the late employee's work to continue their own. In church circles there are some faithful who go to Mass late, no matter what you say. You cannot explain what a disruption this causes to those who might be either praying, trying to listen to the Word of God or trying to catch a message from the homily. Just as five minutes late can cost you the job, why should five minutes not cost you heaven? I remember presiding over a wedding where the bride did not walk down the aisle instead she literally ran down the aisle because she was late. The Mass was half way through; she had formed the habit of being late ! If I were an employer would I have been sympathetic to a man who was always late for five minutes? Not at all. I would have dismissed him even much earlier.

THIS WREATH WILL WITHER; FIGHT FOR THE ETERNAL

Mahatma Gandhi once said that 'poverty is the worst form of violence' this proved true for some of us who do not have the opportunity to watch all the Olympic

games on the television because as you know some extra channels including sports channels are paid for separate from the ordinary TV Licence fee all of us pay for. If you are financially unable to pay for those channels, all you have to do is to be stuck with the programs given by the BBC. Whether you have extra sports channels or you depend on the four television channels (BBC 1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4) like myself, watching the Olympians on the TV challenged my Christian behaviour. In all sports, human endurance is put to the test, every aspect and rule of the game is kept right, no competitor wants to be disqualified. The competitors carry the hope of the nations, It is a loss not only to the player or to the team but to the whole country when the competitor does not qualify. On the centrally the whole country is set ablaze with happiness when one of their national wins. What a shame to the American nation that some of its Olympians stage-managed a robbery and claimed it against the Brazilian people, so as to make headlines for themselves! If you translate the Olympics into our Christian life, then you come to understand how each one of us must work hard to go to heaven (and not to be disqualified). Olympics remind us that salvation is not a personal matter but real team work. Olympics remind us that eternal damnation of anyone of us is a terrible disaster just as the failure of a player is a national disaster! Practice makes perfect. The Olympians practiced their routines for hundreds of times, that is why they could perform those routines, some of them in synchronised manner that we are left wondering how on earth they could do that! The secret of their success is in practice. This reminds us that unless Christian faith is practiced again and again, we cannot become perfect followers of Jesus. This I'm sure of: people whose relationship with the church is at baptism and at the funeral, they will remain shallow in the practice of faith. It is most likely that St. Paul attended Olympic games in Athens at one time. He saw the physical cost upon the man in terms of training and straining but the winner received merely a wreath of green leaves which withered away shortly afterwards. Nevertheless this taught him a lesson, he saw the demands of Christian life and related them to the demands of the games. (1Cor. 9:25-27).The fundamental difference between a Christian and Olympian is that while the Olympian received a wreath which withered away, the Christian would receive a wreath which would never wither. Well as a Christian keep on fighting to win the wreath that is eternal all the rest is vanity.

September 2016

WE SHALL NOT WIN THIS WAR: If you were a king marching to war with 10,000 cowardly soldiers against another king with 10 brave men, be sure the ten thousand cowards will crush each other to death in stampede at the sight of the 10 brave men. If you have 100 medical doctors trained and enrolled to save life and to prevent disease but they are obsessed with personal safety, salary increment, or whether the time they are called for duty is convenient or not, be sure that many patients will die and no disease would ever be cured or prevented. Empires, kingdoms and governments survive not because of the officers who think of their personal convenience but because of the men and women whose obedience to the call to duty could not be compromised. The world has been kept safe and free of catastrophe by just some few people who take risks, who brave the weather no matter the storm and hurricanes in order to make things happen. No battle has ever been won by cowards and no business has ever succeeded if employers and employees act as long as it is convenient for them to do so. A brave person is judged by the way he faces a situation. Patriotism is not judged by the sweet words but by the way some one gets positively involved at the time of crisis. In my village back home in Uganda, true friendship is not judged by the manner some one is enthusiastic to roast steak yet he is absent whenever the hunt is called! In English culture friendship is not judged by the way someone is present at every occasion when there is a glass of champagne but and more especially at the time when there are difficulties. These analogies apply to the church and to every parish, the involvement of every baptised, the presence of the members of the parish at all weather is what makes them to truly belong. In the New Testament, Presence was the criterion which the apostles used in order to choose the man who was going to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:21 & 22). Seasonal members were dropped. This could mean that it is important that when the church or the parish is going through difficulties for the parishioners to be there and to remain firm on the course. Among the dangers facing the church are the search for personal convenience and desire to please everyone. When this happens the prophetic voice is lost. When priests and people start to look for convenience other than braving the storm, that is the end of the good news. The other day I sat in the Church of St. Marys for a while gazing steadily at the huge crucifix. A thought came to my

mind: was it convenient for Jesus to suffer the agony of the Cross to save me? Surely he didn't die on the cross because it was convenient but by total commitment to us. We are living in a changing world, the war of our faith will not be won only by our old changeless weapons and tactics, we need to employ new weapons and to grab every opportunity in order to continue following Jesus Christ. The church needs us all. The parish counts on every one of its members except the lukewarm. If we seek convenience, I can assure you that we shall not win this war.

FAITH MUST COME OUT THROUGH EVERY PART OF YOUR BODY.

Jesus spoke about being prepared at all time to receive the Master when he returns. He spoke also about being vigilant just like bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Last Sunday I baptised a little lovely girl. While doing so, I realised how the church prepares us her children to be ready to meet with the Lord. As we moved from one point to the other in that ceremony, it became clear to me that Baptism a sacrament of preparation and preservation. The sacramental anointing of several parts of our bodies reminds us that indeed our bodies are consecrated and preserved to resurrect in the presence of God. Are you making your body to come into the presence of God? How does the Church prepare our bodies to come into the Presence of God? Keep your sight pure: one day our eyes will see God thus the Catholic Church teaches us not to see dirty pictures pornography etc. Pornography is a grave sin because these eyes of ours should be prepared to see their Creator and Saviour. Keep your ears pure: because one day they will hear the voice of God calling. The Catholic Church teaches us that it is not right for Christians to listen to gossip. It does not matter whether you engage in it or not but the fact of listening to it, defiles the very purpose of God's gift of hearing. Keep your mouth pure: because one day our mouths will raise their voices to praise God in heaven. Therefore it is not good or Christians to use swear words, to speak obscene words, to verbally abuse others or to curse them. Yes we must prepare our mouths to praise God in the company of the saints by using them to praise God here on earth. Keep your heart pure to love God for all eternity therefore the Church teaches us not to bear grudges, hatred, envy, anger and all those favourite moods which estrange us from loving other people. Faith in God is an interior

activity of the soul but it is an activity of the body too. It must be seen in our thoughts, in our mouths, in our ears, hands and relationships. Today in Rome the Holy Father Pope Francis will declare Mother Theresa of Calcutta a saint, she never ruled empires, she never fought for her country or wear any medal. She cannot boast of any scientific invention. The church sets her as an example for the human race simply because she let her faith to come out through every part of her body. She was not afraid to see, to touch, to speak, to listen. She used every part of her body and prepared it to meet God.

IMAGINE THAT SR. OSBURG DID NOT PASS ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Usain Bolt a Jamaican splinter stunned the world last month in Rio de Janeiro when he and his teammates won the 4x4 relay. You must have watched them too. The runners were given a baton which they had to pass on to their teammate in the quickest possible time. He had to make sure that he handed it over carefully otherwise if it was dropped the team would be disqualified. The person who received the baton had to make sure that he received it firmly and safely; he too was supposed to run as fast as possible to pass it on to another runner until the final man. If one of the runners upon receiving the baton decided to walk or to sit down the whole team would suffer defeat no matter the good efforts of others. Usain Bolt was hailed as a world champion but he did not act alone, he was supported by his teammates. Today we celebrate One thousand years of Catholicism in Coventry and the legacy of Sr. Osburg the first abbess of the Covent founded by King Canute at Coventry. She received the Christian faith and passed it on to others by caring for the sick and the poor of the city. To Sr. Osburg, Christian faith was like the baton, she grasped it firmly, practiced it tirelessly and passed it over to others with utmost care. Down the centuries Catholic families have taught their children the true catholic faith they received, the faith that they grasped firmly like the baton. As a consequence many men and women of our land were even ready to be hanged, drawn and quartered other than denying that faith! As we celebrate this event, we are all assembled here as children of God but do you think that we are safely keeping the faith, teaching it and passing it on to others? In the past parents baptised their children because they wanted them to live as Christians. These

days some parents ask for baptism because they want to have a party. In the past Sunday was a Holy day centred on the Sunday Mass these days Sunday is the only day families can go shopping or when parents can take the children to play football! In the past children grew up in a home where the love of a mother and a father shaped their life, but these days children do not know even with which parent or step parent they are going to spend the weekend with! Other children may not even know who to call mother or father in the house. What a sad world we are living in today in the name of freedom? I ask you to look at the Catholic faith and its wisdom as a baton given to you as a Catholic of today. To practice our faith today is the only day we have; yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not yet come and in the words of the famous Irish singer Daniel O'Donnell, 'tomorrow may never be mine' therefore we have only today. Let us begin. In God's infinite plan he willed that we should be here today to celebrate this event. If you do not receive the faith, practice it tirelessly and pass it on to others, what is the future of Christianity? Unless you take your faith like a baton given to you to be passed on to others be sure the game is over.

THEY HAVE MOSES AND THE PROPHETS

Most of us have heard or read the story in Luke's Gospel 16:19-31 told by Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus. Well the rich man had worked hard to earn his money, the comfortable life he had was well deserved. It was a result of his hard work. To put it in our contemporary language; his business was open 24hrs a day, 7 days a week 365 days a year. With such busy working patterns nothing could stop him becoming rich. After death the man found himself in hell. Yet even there he had some goodness in him; he begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to tell them to change their behaviour and to warn them of hell. It is the answer that Abraham gave that is relevant to us; he said "they have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them" (Lk 16:29) Who are the Moses and Prophets Jesus implies that Abraham was talking about? There is no doubt Abraham according to Jesus was referring to the priests; they spend their entire life preaching the word of God, warning all people to guard against sin and exhorting us to persevere in the faith. At funerals priests encourage people to follow Jesus Christ the Way the Truth and the Life. What happens? Who takes notice? Well if people do not listen to what

the Catholic church teaches when the priests explain the Word of God to them, I'm sure they will not listen even if someone would rise from the dead! These days some people do not listen to what the priests say, as a matter of fact it is not uncommon to find those who take pride in disobedience, criticising or taking offense at every word spoken to them by their priests. According to the story of Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus, if the teaching office of the church will not touch your life to be converted to God, nothing will convert you even if someone would come back from the dead. That is hell! When I was growing up, my parents used to say to me that while priests made mistakes and committed sins like anybody else, we owed them respect and obedience. My mother would add "yes he is chosen by God from among the people but he is actually NOT one of the men in the community but a special man anointed by God to deliver his message. It is God's message." "They have Moses and the prophets" in other words they have the priests let them listen to them. Every parish priest leaving a parish will speak to the man who replaces him about two people, first those members of the parish he can turn to for good advice, support and realistic assessment of issues. Secondly he will also speak to him about those who are fault finders, and in some rare cases he might mention to him those he might need to keep at an arm's length. Such will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets! From this September priests are taking up their new posts the way we act can become part of the two people he will talk about to the new priest when he comes.

October 2016

JESUS WAS MUCH OF A PREACHER THAN AN ENTERTAINER

The training of a priest takes several years and his ordination to the priesthood is one of the most elaborate rituals of the Catholic Church. To some, the long years of training a Catholic priest may seem a waste of time but to many people including the candidates themselves, the long years of study, character formation, psychological and moral training are necessary if someone is to equip himself with the tools he will need in the exercise of such a sacred ministry. The Catholic priest exercises his ministry not in his name but in the name of Jesus who as he himself declares, chooses the priest to go and bear fruit John

15:16. Well any person who has accepted to stand-in for someone or to do some duty in another person's name he/she must act with diligence. Recently I met a man who wanted a little bit of comedy in the church; he had visited several non-Catholic churches around the city where he enjoyed good laughter during the services; this time the Catholic Mass was on the menu. He sat there anxiously waiting to have a good laugh but nothing came. Most of the prayers were calmly conducted, silence and personal reflection encouraged. After the Mass he came to me to express his disappointment: "When will you Catholics make the church more entertaining? I sat here for one hour, and no one stood up to give testimony, that poor man in the wheel chair was not healed! It is too silent here, there was no applause and shouts 'In the name of Jesus Alleluia— Amen'. The hour I spent here was wasted, some churches I go to I return home greatly entertained" Jesus was much of a preacher than an entertainer, he did not draw crowds to himself because of comedy but "because of the gracious words that came from his mouth" Lk 4:22. It is not uncommon these days to find people moving from church to church sampling one priest after the other. This habit is not good because such people have no commitment to any parish community. Many parishes these days have no real community where someone is known and he/she knows others! A parish is a family of believers where by if the members of this family know one another, they can support each other to fulfil the mission Jesus has entrusted to each one of them. A candidate to catholic priesthood is trained to understand and to explain the meaning and relevance of the Word of God in the people's lives. Since he has been entrusted with God's message, he will be less likely to innovate or to treat these mysteries as if they were his own. For those who have taken preaching as a business, there will always be the desire to innovate, to claim supernatural powers to heal and to claim performing extraordinary miracles even more than Jesus in order to keep the business afloat.

A MOBILE PHONE GOING OFF IN CHURCH COULD BE SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT YOU

Someone told me of her experience when she and her husband visited one of the churches in Coventry recently. "It is absolutely disgusting" she said "to hear people's mobile phones going off from time to time during the Mass". From her face I could read real

concern for a real nuisance which many people seem not to see. I too recall those times that mobile phones of some people went off during Mass! It is very annoying because the people who hear this phone interrupting their prayers had no intention to come to listen to that phone ringing no matter how musical the calling tone may be. When we come to church, Switch off your phone first! It is courtesy and a sign of awareness of the sacred time and the sacred act of worship we are offering to God. Therefore you would not be expecting to be in conversation with anyone except your creator. Jesus calls it "shutting one's door" Matt.6:6. Some people make calls to cause anxiety, to upset or to annoy others. Think of the telephone calls we often get offering a product or service, encouraging you to claim thousands of pounds in compensation for an injury you hadn't even suffered. Some calls are scams, designed to trick you into giving away your money or personal information. Someone may unintentionally have dialed a wrong number. Every time we receive these calls, we feel disgusted. How much annoying to those whose prayers are interrupted by a bogus caller simply because you gave him an opportunity by leaving your phone not switched off? But the phone going off during Mass, has another story that it tells about its owner; unfortunately the story is not good, that is why no one would like to hear that story especially in church; not even its owner. Some people have asked me to put up warning signs urging people to switch off their mobile phones! My answer has always been NO! I believe that we make deliberate choice to come to church to pray, we do not just find ourselves accidentally in church, we plan to come here. This deliberate decision requires a deliberate action namely to switch off my mobile phone when I go to church. If you do not switch off your mobile phone in places or at occasions you are supposed to, be prepared for embarrassment. I remember one funeral of a child I attended recently. It was a tearful funeral, but while the coffin was being carried in church someone's mobile went off in a horrible loud music. People were upset. Later on during as the mourners listened to the eulogy the same mobile phone went off in the same horrific loud ringtone. In panic the man did not know in which pocket it was. Mourners were so offended; the phone owner was greatly embarrassed. I asked him what the call was about he replied "Someone was telling me to make a claim for an accident I never had! Are you going to church SWITCH OFF YOUR PHONE you will not be embarrassed.

WHEN LOVE GROWS COLD, WHAT IS LEFT IN A RELATIONSHIP?

With the increase of lawlessness, love in most men will grow cold but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved" Matt 24:12. Thanks to God for the Sacrament of Confirmation which was celebrated at St. Mary's on Wednesday, it was an occasion of great joy to see so many being sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. At that occasion it was not difficult to notice some people who have relegated their going to church only to such occasions but nothing more! While it is good to see them I cannot fail to mention that that is hardly the way the practice of Christian faith ought to be. I remember some people who were once in deep love. They were not husband and wife, yet they enjoyed each others company; they prayed together, recreated together and even went on holidays together. A jealous person they took for a friend carried unfounded stories between them and everything came down crushing to pieces. The trust they had in each other, the risks they had taken for the other, the places they had always visited together, none of these held meaning anymore. Consequently love grew cold such that all the affection for the people and place they had loved bore no meaning! What is left in a love relationship when love grows cold apart from anguish and despair! Human nature will try to find reasons for self justification but what I know for sure is that Love lost does not bring peace of mind no matter how much we may justify ourselves. It is good never to let love grow cold either for self or for others. When I was training for priesthood, my formators most of whom were foreign missionaries spoke to us of the heroic lives of the saints, they spoke about the sacrifices that people in their homelands were making for the spread of the faith and how fervent the people were. But alas this is not the case anymore. A friend of mine visiting one country which was the beacon of evangelization lamented to be present at a wedding where only the priest, the altar server, my friend and his wife were the only ones who literally answered to the prayers of the Mass. I know that some of us might already excuse them by thinking that they might not have been Catholics, but the truth of the matter is that they were Catholics who no longer practiced the faith because they were 'angry with the church'. Zeal for faith in Jesus was no more, they were spiritual dead men walking. I pray that our love for God, for his

Church and for each other never grow cold. Surely people who see only the negatives in the church or in their relationships give sufficient evidence that their love has grown cold. But the person who stands firm through his perseverance will be saved for when love grows cold whatever is left is emptiness.

“WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY IF.....?”

I'm not sure whether I could call it 'independent thinking' or it is just lack of self respect, but these days people are not mindful of the opinion others will have of them if they say this or do that. "Mind your business" some say; but the consequences of this kind of attitude is that role models are becoming a thing of the past! An older person who uses bad language and when challenged would say "mind your business" does not set good example for others to follow. Scandal is not when a priest goes against his priestly calling, it includes also people who deserve respect but behave foolishly instead. It is common to make all sorts of excuses for bad behaviour, but it does not take away the fact that, that is not what was expected of you. When I was growing up I used to hear my parents say "what will people say"! Surely their life was not controlled by public opinion, but it was a way of avoiding shame if they caused scandal. A good name is better than ill-gotten wealth or fame. A person who is conscious of his/her good name will tread carefully and act with honour. A person who does not take into consideration the opinion that others will have of them because of their behaviour, have lost every good friendship and ruined their very souls. Recently someone was talking over the radio that children are naturally rebellious these days. The panel seemed to agree that society has changed so much such that even children no longer obey authority, either at home or in schools. They are not even respectful to the Police! Well I think when the people who would be looked at by children to learn good example do not care about what people will say, we cannot expect much. The Christian Bible talks about a man who chose to die rather than to bring his name into disrepute, or to give an example that would lead others astray. "Such a pretence does not square with our time of life, many young people would suppose that Eleazar at the age of 90 had conformed to the pagan way of behaviour and might themselves be led astray on my account, I should only bring defilement and disgrace on my old age" 2nd Macc. 6:124-26. It is good to think twice before you

act. It is not naivety to take with you wherever you go your self respect. Mind your business is never a sign either of humility or teachability. Back at home, our culture forbids a husband and wife to exchange sharp words in front of the children. Our culture forbids swearing, using obscene words, watching TV programs which have adult content in the presence of someone junior to me. All this points to the same concern "What will people say"? A society or individuals who do not care about what people will say is gone to the dogs. Do you want to get some morals? Just ask yourself "What will the people say if.....!"

COVENTRY WINTER NIGHT SHELTER AT ST OSBURG

The Coventry Winter Night Shelter is running again this year as winter sets in. Seven churches in Coventry namely St. Paul Foleshill, St. Georges Coundon, St. Osburg Radford, The Salvation Army Upperwell Street, St. Oswald Tile hill, St. Columba Canal Basis and St. Anne and All Saints Charterhouse will each take 1 night per week to host 20 homeless people who would otherwise be on the streets. The HOPE project, which organises the night shelter, will work with individual homeless people to help them into permanent accommodation and support them St Osburg will host Wednesday nights providing refreshments and an evening meal, a bed for the night and breakfast the next morning. The night shelter will run from 1st December until 31st March and the project is looking for volunteers to work either evening shifts (7:00pm-10:00pm) night shifts (10:00pm-7:00am or morning shifts (7:00am to 9:00am). Volunteers work on a rota basis according to their availability. St Osburg's is particularly short of people to offer night shifts. If you are interested in getting involved a training event is organised at the Welcome Centre Parkside on Thursday 3rd November starting at 7:00pm. If you would like to know more, please contact Louisa Hopkins 07828 739064 Louisadowden@gmail.com or Carmen Robinson 07711 300450 carmenatmoseley@aol.com The organising team are looking for donations of: Men's boxers, men's socks, men's deodorant, liquid soap (alcohol free), toothpaste, toothbrush, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, cup-a-soup, biscuits, sugar, tins of stew, chunky soup, beans. You can give these donations by contacting them on the above contact. Could you offer hair-cuts, chiropody, or perhaps you speak another language, please let them know. St Osburg is in short supply of

volunteers to work on the night shift. The group aims to have enough volunteers so that each would only be needed one night a month (unless of course you wanted to do more!) I thank all those who are already involved in this act of mercy.

November 2016

WE PRAY FOR THEM NOW ,WE SHALL NEED THEM SOMEDAY

The month of November is dedicated to the memory of our faithfully departed brothers and sisters, and our duty to pray for them. The Church's teaching about life after death is summarized in the Four Last Things — death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Even humanity outside the Church instinctively knows something about these four things. Death is certain, but not everyone knows what comes next. Nearly all religions and cultures believe in some form of life after death. Human nature's sense of justice tells us that there must be an ultimate reckoning, that in the final analysis no one can cheat the moral law and get away with it or suffer undeserved injustice and not be justly compensated. Since this ultimate justice does not seem to be achieved in this life, there must be somewhere . Human nature carries with it the instinctive conviction that there must be a higher, more-than-human justice, where just judgement will be met. The final judgment is an encounter with Christ Human nature know that justice separates good from evil, therefore, after death there must be separate destinies — rewards for good and punishments for evil. Human nature thus also believes in some form of heaven and hell. Heaven is union with God, Hell is separation from Him. Each one of us will be either with God or without him forever. If hell is not real, then Jesus Christ is a liar for he warned us repeatedly and with utmost seriousness about it. If hell is not real, the Church and the Bible are liars too. Our basis for believing in the reality of hell is exactly the same authority as our basis for believing in the reality of heaven Is it necessary to ask for Holy Mass to be offered for my loved ones? The answer is YES. Offering sacrifices for someone is no new idea. It was common practice in O. Testament times. "Job's sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. After the feast, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the

morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' (Job 1:4-5) Job, who was "blameless and upright," offered sacrifices for his sons just in case. We Catholics pray and offer Masses for the living and for the dead exactly for the same reasons. From the beginning the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them. The sacrifice of the Mass is one of the best ways to pray for those who have gone before us; so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. None of us believes that the mercy of God will forget the dead, it would be wrong to neglect praying and making offerings for them as much as we do for the living. The dead need our prayers today just as we shall need them tomorrow.

"IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SUPERFLOUS AND FOOLISH"

Maccabees 12:44 Travelling in a private car is not necessarily beneficial as there are a lot of things which you miss. People who travel by public transport do struggle; they have to wait for the bus for several minutes in weather conditions which may be hostile. But there are benefits too, you have the chance to look at different faces and to listen to different conversations. Unlike in my country Uganda where travelers can join in any conversation that might come up on the bus, the British way is to keep quiet and listen otherwise you will be accused of interference and intrusion in other people's conversation! This makes travelling in Britain a lonely and tiring experience. Few days ago I found myself taking a bus to Wood-end. On the bus there were these two men who were talking about praying for the repose of the souls of the dead. One man was anxious to pray for them, as a matter of fact he had been to Mass in his local parish since it was All souls day. God is merciful he said but his mercy cannot rule out his justice. I pray for the dead he went on to say, because I know that we do not have a right to God's love or to his mercy, we simply ask for it from God. The other man was busy laughing at him, because in his words the fate of those who had died was already fixed by God, no matter how much we pray for them God will not change his mind. The man boasted about his right to heaven simply because he was baptized irrespective of his immoral behavior. He had the passport that's it! I'm quite sure that you too have come across people who have

laughed off or ridiculed your faith. There are those also who never believe in Hell or in Purgatory, all that exists with certainty for them is Heaven. Some people may have the same opinion as the two men on a bus to Woodend , yet the bible continues to teach us that God has acted favorably in certain situations simply because others asked. In Luke 11:8, Jesus talks about a man who went to ask his friend for some provisions in the middle of the night because he had received an unexpected guest. While the man was reluctant to wake up, persistent calling and knocking at the door was unbearable, he woke up and gave his friend all he needed. Mark 2:25 talks about an incident when a severely paralyzed man was lowered through the roof to the place where Jesus was. The man could not bring himself to Jesus but he relied on others' efforts. Seeing their faith he healed the man. Those who have died need our prayers asking God to have mercy on them. We do not believe in a God who has already sealed the fate of anyone of us but we believe in a God of tenderness, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness , that is why during this month of November we approach him with total confidence. If God was not merciful it would be superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead.

GOD WANTED TO SHOW HIS MERCY

Next weekend Sunday 20th November in a 'symbolic' gesture, the Church will close the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Of course the Mercy of God cannot be closed off but as human beings, our life is regulated by seasons. The symbolic opening and closing of the Door of Mercy, reminds us of the special time we the people of God are marking. When I heard that the Church of St. Mary's and St. Benedict was named a Jubilee Shrine for the Year of Mercy, I could not contain my joy. It was a great honor, a lifetime gift that God bestowed upon me as Parish Priest and upon all the people who form part of this community. Try to imagine that we had not tried to persevere in faith together, making this church our place of prayer and encounter with the Mercy of God! Try also to imagine what would happen if you did not stand by this parish in good times and in bad times, we could not have been given such a great honor. In Coventry, St Mary's is a small church, almost insignificant, which cannot boast of anything except the love of God that brings us together most of us on

buses and on foot for our daily and Sunday Masses. Thanks to God a few among us also drive to church. St. Mary's is 99.9% made up of immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Like a mother embracing and taking care of her children St. Mary's has taken care of all the people that begin their life here in the city. Recently I listened to the story of young Irish girls who came to Coventry in 1950's to work in Golson Hospital. Life was very difficult. but St. Mary's gave them the platform to stand on in order to get on with life. Once you leave your homeland, life is never the same. Nowadays people have shorter memory than those of the past, it is unfortunate that some do forget the role that the Catholic church has played in their lives to bring them to where they are. Well, never forget the mercy of the Lord. Reflecting on our individual stories, let us turn what we have received into action. As I listen to the stories of many people, all that I hear about are the humble beginnings of men and women who came to Coventry and were welcomed by this Church. This is where life began. I ask the people of St. Mary's to have a profound love for their parish and a deep respect and support of one another. The humble beginnings of each one of us are a sure proof that that God has a plan. St. Mary's church was not randomly chosen. In God's infinite plan it is here that he brings people from different nationalities, with different aspirations and with troubled life to begin life so that by doing so, they may know that He is merciful.

IT IS THE FINAL GIFT WE SHALL DEPART THIS LIFE **ASKING GOD FOR:**

Mercy is one of the attributes of God that we might never understand in this life. It is not a natural human inclination to be merciful but it is Divine. Recently I took keen interest in following the American politics. I was frustrated when I could hear accusations and counter accusations between the two main political rivals Mr. Donald Trump and Mrs. Hilary Clinton. What upset me most was to hear Mr. Trump and his supporters demanding for Hilary Clinton to be locked up in jail. Locking H. Clinton up was a campaign promise that most of us wait to happen. I don't think that credible democratic systems operate by putting their opponents in jails. Thanks to the media, it is exposing the hypocrisy in societies which were taken to be sacrosanct models of democracy. "Lock her up" tells the human story, Mercy tells the divine story. Being merciful basically means that, when we deserve

punishment, we are not punished. Mercy is the withholding of a just condemnation and the Bible gives many illustrations of God not “locking up” people but blessing them and letting them go free. In the gospel of Matthew 18:23–27 Jesus describes a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. They brought him a man who owed £10,000.00 but had no means to pay, so the king decided that the man be sold, his wife and children auctioned and all his possessions to recover the money! The debtor begged for mercy. The king felt sorry for the man, he cancelled the debt and set him free to return to his family. Interestingly, after he had been showed mercy, the man met his fellow servant on his way home who was in debt to him of about £10.00 he grabbed him by the throat and wanted to have his cash then and there! We all know what became of the unforgiving servant. Thousands of people have passed through the Door of Mercy at St. Marys asking for mercy from God. I pray that together we may one day pass through the Door of Mercy Jesus Christ. If you passed through the Door of Mercy, the real work begins, God has been merciful to you; GO! BE MERCIFUL AND FORGIVING TO OTHERS for “if you do not forgive others, your Heavenly Father will not forgive your failings either (Matthew 6:15). Mercy is an ongoing Christian activity without end. The Holy Door of Mercy has closed go and open the door mercy in your life. The call to Mercy continues and it is the final gift that we shall depart this life asking God for. Mercy is the only gift we give to others to receive it back for “Blessed are the merciful they shall be showed mercy” Matt 5:7 November is a month to pray for those who have died, unlike Mr. Trump and his supporters, we do not plead that God locks up our brothers and sisters but that he grants them his mercy. Thanks to God for being merciful .

WE CAN BECOME UNBEATABLE GIANTS OF MERCY

It was a moving prayerful service last Sunday at St. Mary’s and St. Benedict Church as we witnessed the climax of the Jubilee Year of Mercy with the closing of the Holy Door. I thank you the people of the Catholic denary of Coventry for the faith that has been showed since the jubilee began. Thousands of pilgrims have visited the jubilee shrine at St. Mary’s and walked through the Door of Mercy. Organized school pilgrimages were made. I thank the Head teachers of our primary schools who through their R E teachers

took time to explain to the pupils what it meant to pass through the Door of Mercy. I thank the pilgrims who visited the church on a daily basis and those who visited it on a weekly basis. Some of these pilgrimages were led by their parish priests. Visits were not simply made for oneself, but also on behalf of those who would not have had the opportunity to pass through the Holy Door, namely the sick in hospital, the housebound, and those serving prison sentences. A prayer made on their behalf was indeed acceptable to God. Now that the Jubilee Year has come to an end, what follows is to practice what we have been schooled by Jesus Christ himself. “Learn from me for I’m meek and humble of heart” Blessed are those who show mercy because mercy shall be showed to them” It can safely be said that Mercy must be the operating principle of every human action. Whenever you do something even as little as a spoken word, try to see how much ingredients of mercy are therein contained. We are such a great army to set the world ablaze with mercy; all that we need is to go and do it. Before the declaration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, “justice” meant that the sinner must be punished and the virtuous rewarded. After the jubilee “Mercy” means that we begin where justice is meant to cease. We cannot speak about mercy unless we realize God’s Mercy to us individually, family or community and be ready to pass it on to others. If you will be merciful, nothing will stop you from being and becoming an unbeatable giant of mercy. Advent is an opportune time to start putting the jubilee into action.

December 2017

YOU TOO ARE MAKING HISTORY

Some four years ago, I visited the Holy Land, the place where Jesus was born. This week I was in Rome for a meeting concerning my Religious Order of the Apostles of Jesus Missionaries. When you visit these two places you return home greatly strengthened in the Christian faith. The land of Israel and the city of Rome both tell a great story namely the triumph of Jesus Christ and of his reign in the hearts of mankind. Today Rome is congested with right hand driven speeding traffic, thousands of speeding small motorcycles and slow walking tourists. They come from all over the world to try to capture a story that was written thousands of years by Christianity. Much of what draws tourists to Rome however goes unnoticed. About 2000 years ago

two prisoners were brought to the city. No written material has survived to tell us the crime they had committed either against the empire. All that we know is that the two prisoners were faithful followers of Jesus Christ, so convinced that they could not change their story even in the face of death. I'm talking about Peter the fisherman and Paul a fanatic Pharisee. The city of Rome is adorned with memories that testify to Christian witness most of which is written in the blood of the martyrs. When you stumble upon some historical facts the best reaction should be to become more curious. It would be stupid to dismiss the story or to behave as if nothing ever happened. Christianity is not an invented myth! There are also those who think that the Catholic church is "ONE OF THE CHURCHES" historical facts and witness of the martyrs evidence that there is one church the one that descended from the faith of Peter. Some people say that history is written by the victors. In the case of the Holy Land and the city of Rome, what has shaped their history is the defeated man on Calvary, the executed Peter and Paul in Rome and hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who were devoured to death in the Colosseum to the amusement of onlookers! As Christians more so Catholics, we shall not live as victors in this world; far from it. We shall be at the edge of persecution and extinction, even from our own numbers but let us remember that we too are making history. Many people no longer differentiate sin from virtue. Like the first Christians of Rome, we might end up apparently defeated but our courage and fidelity is what will make a history never to be forgotten.

THESE EVENTS CONCERN YOU TOO.

In the last two weeks we had the parish bazaars of St. Mary's and lately of St. Osburg. I wish to thank you all for the hard work and for the generosity you showed. Every priest who gets involved in the parish fundraising process is faced with two big difficulties: First he will find it hard to single out the people that work hard for the upkeep of the parish, since everyone seems to be doing something, Second he will personally feel that there are some people who would contribute greatly to the building of the parish and the church in general if only and only if they came on board. Not everybody will see things in the same perspective. Some people will always think that it is other's duty to do things, while some will need to be asked in order to do something. Only few people will take it as a duty to do

parish work even without being asked. The priest ends up having always the same people who sacrifice their time and energy to make things happen. In the gospel of Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus spoke of a business man with some property which he could not run himself. He was going on a long business trip. He called up his workers and entrusted portions of his business to them. They were to manage them not collectively but individually "each in proportion to his ability" Then he set out. The active participation of each trustee would contribute to the general success of the master's business and the non cooperation of one would undermine the business success. This story gets a new meaning when you look at it within the context of a parish setting. The parish has no owner; it is neither a priest's property nor the people's property. Priest and people are trustees who have been entrusted by Jesus Christ to build his kingdom in a local setting we call a parish. Some baptised will understand this responsibility others will not. The involvement of every family member when there is a family function strengthens the bonds of relationships while the absence of one leaves so many questions in the minds of family members. I heard some parishioners from both parishes wondering why so and so did not turn up? I think they felt that the presence of so and so would have made a great difference. Let us remember that every baptised is a trustee of the church, he/she has been entrusted with the duty to be a faithful and loyal servant therefore the events that take place in the church including the parish bazaars concern you too.

"I WANT TO LOOK AROUND"

There is no doubt that the excitement of Christmas is in the air. If you want to know the power of Jesus Christ and of his reign, just watch how everything takes up a new look during this time; houses are decorated with lights, shops get new commodities, supermarkets stock more goods, the Post Office is overwhelmed by the number of letters and parcels to deliver. There are no faith based events that are celebrated universally and with such great consistence than the Christian festivals. This is another way that assures me of the truth of the Christian beliefs. If the events we celebrate about Jesus Christ, were invented myths, we would already have felt bored by them; instead, every Christmas is anticipated and longed for as if no other has come before! Jesus Christ the true reason for

Christmas is being taken out of it. He is not a seasonal man that we should fall so much in love with him at a certain time of the year. How sad that churches get packed on Christmas day and yet they are the best wilderness you would wander into during the year? Where are the crowds that fill churches to capacity on Christmas but not on Sunday—the day of the Lord? I'm sure you are not one of those who go to church only at Christmas. I commend you for your faithfulness to the Mass. I'm opposed to the idea that people can visit the church "just to look around." When someone comes to me and wants to go into the church "just to look around" my usual answer is No for the simple reason that , the church has no tourist attractions to be seen and it is not a museum. Just walking into the church and "look around" is very common in Anglican church buildings such as cathedrals. The consequences of this are disastrous in a sense that the sacredness of once-upon-a-time holy places is lost. Beside I don't think that entering the church to 'look around' will bring about conversion. Let us translate this into Christmas and all the fuss that goes with it. Surely to limit going to church only on Christmas as many people do does not make one a Christian. Christian living is like flying in an aeroplane or riding a bicycle—when you stop, you fall! The world demands fidelity, constancy and full grasp of what we believe. We live in a world where everything is superficial and where truthfulness carry no much meaning. Correctness has replaced truthfulness! Someone will not see any problem with opening sacred spaces like Catholic churches for people to wander around, but the truth is that the Catholic church building is a Holy Place housing Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacred Host– the Eucharist. Here his name is invoked and honoured. As you go to Christmas services this time don't just look around but try to capture the presence of God and worship him there. Remember! Jesus Christ is not a seasonal man, He is, He was and He will be forever.

THIS IS HOW MARY COULD HAVE TOLD THE STORY

Before reading and writing were invented by primitive man information was passed on by word of mouth. A good story teller felt duty bound to grasp the story, understand it and pass it on. Those days people were careful to keep the story with its original message otherwise it ceased to be the story that was being told. The greatest story ever told is that concerning Jesus of

Nazareth. The Good News about him was not his miraculous conception and birth, but his crucifixion, death and resurrection. These were publicly seen. On the contrary the events surrounding his birth are likely to have been told by the Blessed Virgin Mary his Mother, since they took place in private. None of the evangelists was in picture then, so whatever they wrote about the conception and birth of Jesus must have come from his mother. This is how Mary told the story according to Luke : "Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census– the first, took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph and I set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judea to the town of David called Bethlehem since he was of David's house and line in order to be registered with me since I was betrothed to him and I was with child. While we were there the time came for me to have the baby and I gave birth to a son. I wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for us in the inn. In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took it in turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified, but the angel said 'do not be afraid, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people . Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you ; you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. Suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of heavenly host praising God and singing: 'Glory to God in the highest and peace to men who enjoy his favour'" When the angels had gone from them into heaven the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us. So they hurried and found Joseph and I and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the baby they repeated what they had been told about him and everyone was astonished at what the shepherds had to say.'" I know that during this time friends and families will sit together, share stories and crack jokes. Please share this story too but don't include it among the jokes. I wish you a very peaceful celebration of Christmas. Thank you for being here.
