

GOD MUST BE IN OUR PLAN TOO

A warm welcome to 2013. This Sunday Mother Church invites us to celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord that is the appearance of God made man in Jesus now adored by all nations. I was listening to the radio on Thursday morning and I heard it mentioned that in January all Zoos in England make mandatory head-count of all animals and insects in their keeping. It must be a daunting task, yet it is required for the renewal of their licence.

In business, the New Year is often a stock-taking time; business people make a frantic assessment of their business and map out its future. This applies to Christians too, when the New Year comes along, a good Christian will look back into the past and trace the good hand and kindness of the Lord amid much failure, resistance and unfulfilled resolutions. These he will humbly thank God for. A good

Christian will see the New Year as a sea of opportunity, privilege and responsibility. If you take yourself seriously, you need to notice that New Year resolutions can achieve more meaning if they are founded on the three main virtues of **Faith** in God, **Hope** in his promises and **Love** of God and neighbour. People who make resolutions without believing in God or including him in their plans are as a matter of fact building castles in the air!

Lord in this New Year which we have begun, give us enough happiness to keep us agreeable, enough trials to keep us strong, enough freedom to keep us happy, enough failure to make us humble, enough wealth to meet our needs, enough faith to overcome depression, enough hope to look forward, enough love to give us comfort, and enough determination to keep going. Amen.

IT IS ALWAYS A STUPID THOUGHT:

Someone asked me interesting questions the other day: "Is there life after death? If there is, why don't the dead return to tell us? You might have been asked too. My answer is *"Yes there is life after death. To doubt it would be compared to a baby in the womb to doubt whether there is life outside the mother's womb. We all know that there is no matter how much the baby inside it might deny it.*

The reason why our dead relatives and friends do not return to tell us or why we don't have communication with them is because when we die our mode of existence changes. While we continue to live in the world of the senses, defined by time and space, the dead have transcended these limitations! Even though they are close to us, the limitations of our existence that we are still living in the world of our senses, those who die appear to us as though they have perished but they are not.

When Jesus lived in the same mode of existence with the people of his day, they

lived with him in body that they even arrested him and cried for his death sentence. All they could see was a man! When he died and rose, he remained the same Jesus but his mode of existence changed. He was with his disciples all the time but they could not perceive his presence, he walked with them and held lively debates about the Messiah. He was mistaken for a gardener, he even prepared breakfast. He was the same man the same old friend except that they could not hold him captive. I can say that those moments they recognised him was a glimpse into life after death. The dead miss us so much just as we miss them. As we wish that they could continue to live in our mode of existence, they too wish that we could join their mode of life. Christians are very lucky because Jesus Christ assured us that what we call death is a shift into another home, therefore do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God still and trust in me" he said.

HE THE LIGHT HAS BEEN HERE FOR MORE THAN 2000 YEARS:

The Olympic flame made an incredible journey on land, sea and air as it travelled around the country in preparation for the on-going games. I did not go to see the flame but the enthusiasm of the people to get out to see it fascinated me.

As this took place, I remembered the TRUE FLAME. Over 2000 years ago Jesus declared, *"I'm the light of the world; any one who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* To prove this he healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he raised the dead to life, he made the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak and the blind to see! Jesus the true light of the world has been with us for more than 2000 years but I'm left wondering how many people in our country have the zeal to endure the cold and the heat in order to catch a glimpse of him the true Light of the world!

In his teaching he told his followers that they too were light to the world and that they should let their light shine. The bearers of the Olympic flame were so proud to raise the flame high. Well imagine all the baptised were to let the light of Jesus to shine in their life! Imagine too of any country that calls itself Christian; if it were to live according to the teaching of Christ, what a difference it would make in the world! If this were to happen, I'm sure there would be no wall in ruins, no exile or the sound of crying on our streets.

When the Olympic flame leaves our land, remember that there is a Flame that cannot leave our land - Jesus Christ the true light of the world. If you go out in search of him, you will never lose your way.

DISCIPLINE AT EUCHARISTIC ADORATION AND BENECTION:

Last Sunday I wrote in this column that this Church is a holy place which requires our love and respect. Along that line, I wish to write about BENECTION with the Blessed Sacrament. This is a Latin word meaning a BLESSING. Our parish is so lucky to have the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament four times a week. Very few parishes in our city have this opportunity to enable the faithful to spend some time in silent personal prayer before the Lord.

Adoration is a sign of devotion to Jesus Christ who is present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, under the appearance of the Consecrated Host. As devotion, Eucharistic adoration and meditation are more than merely looking at the Blessed Host, but a continuation of what was celebrated at the Mass namely the saving presence of Jesus among us. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament goes to the earliest times of Christian worship. St. Justine the Martyr and Tertullian for example talk about it in some of their defenses of Christian worship.

The reservation of the Blessed Sacrament for the reason of adoration is found in a life of [St. Basil](#) too (d. 379). At the end of celebrating the Mass in the monastery, Basil is said to have divided the Eucharistic Bread into three parts. One part he consumed, the second he

gave to the monks, and the third he placed in a golden dove suspended above the altar. It is more likely, however, that this separate portion was simply for the purpose of reserving the sacrament for distribution later to those who were not able to be present at Holy Mass.

May I let you know that when the Blessed Sacrament is at the Altar due respect should be observed and unnecessary movements and noise avoided. On certain days the Blessed Sacrament is exposed soon after Mass, it is unbecoming to walk out as the Blessed Sacrament is being placed at the Altar. Remember that it is Jesus himself present here.

When the adoration comes to the end ONLY the Ordained Minister – the priest or the deacon can give a blessing. When the priest elevates the monstrance to bless the faithful present, they are supposed to make the Sign of the Cross over themselves that is why it is called BENECTION. Sometimes a bell might be rung as the priest blesses the people; it is to remind us, that this is a very special moment, if you are moving about, stand where you are until the bell stops.

**As Humble As Doves, Shrewd As Serpents:
Mt 10:16**

I write in this column to welcome you to and to wish you a Happy New Year 2012. I thank you for the work you have done in your own capacities. Your dedication in doing things well, contributed to the extension of God's kingdom here on earth. As we come to pray together, I feel a sense of pride and thanksgiving to God for what you are to this parish. Your regularity in coming to Sunday Mass and your willingness to be involved in the parish activities has made this church a place of prayer, meditation on the Word of God and where the Eucharist is celebrated daily with reverence. This is our program, our sense of duty to God and our source of joy. Thank you for making Jesus Christ present here. Within the last year changes have taken

place in the world some of which will have impact on the Catholic Church. Other changes will be proposed to us as a parish by the diocese so as to keep pace with the changing times. In a changing world it is important that each one of us remains vigilant by taking interest in the affairs of our parish. We take some things for granted just to lament when we lose them. Imagine that this church is closed next year or that it loses a resident priest; will that bother you or you wouldn't mind? The survival of our parish will depend on the practical cooperation of everyone and on our dedicated service to God and to one another. Anyone who thinks that the changes taking place in the world will not affect him/her is dreaming! Keep this in mind "Every Person Here Counts!"

We stand on a Holy Ground:

The Consecration of a church is a liturgy of sanctification and solemn dedication of a building exclusively to God's worship. It is a complex prayer filled with profound symbols. Many biblical elements are taken from the O. Testament: the consecration of the tabernacle Ex.40 and of the temple of Solomon 1Kg 8, [2](#) Chr. 5-7; are some examples. Once a building has been consecrated as a church it may not be used again for secular purposes that is why we must respect this place.

Before the construction of a building designated to be a Catholic Church, the Bishop blesses the endeavor. Before construction begins, the bishop lays a foundation stone that may or may not contain relics of a saint. When construction is completed the building can be consecrated. This is the baptism of that building. It must be free of debts or any legal and personal claims; that is why it took 39 years before our church was consecrated.

The consecration which is done by the diocesan bishop covers the whole church but

the ceremony centers on the sanctuary especially the Altar. In a Catholic Church the Altar is so important; it represents Jesus the Priest, the Altar and Lamb of Sacrifice. The Altar is a table of the sacrifice and Paschal Meal. The priest kisses and incenses it twice at every solemn Mass.

In the early days of Christianity when the Church was severely persecuted, Christians met in underground burial places where they celebrated Mass on the graves of martyred members. After the Church was recognized this custom was continued by permanently sealing relics of saints in the altar stone when the church is being consecrated. This is a reminder to us still on our pilgrimage that the Catholic Church was built on the blood of the martyrs and on their faith in Jesus Christ.

We are lucky to offer our prayers today in a church dedicated to God. We are indeed standing on a Holy ground. In the next issue I will point to you some visible signs that show that our church was indeed consecrated.

Reflections from the Holy Father on Lent:

Many times we hear of people so much concerned about the material welfare of others but we rarely hear of them being so concerned about the spiritual welfare of the same people they feel so much worried about. How much concerned are you about the eternal salvation or damnation of those you love? Well, Pope Benedict as supreme teacher of Christendom gives us some reflections in his Lenten reflections:

“Being concerned for each other also entails being concerned for their spiritual well-being. I would like to mention an aspect of Christian life which has been forgotten: fraternal correction in view of eternal salvation. Today we are very sensitive to the idea of charity and caring about the physical and material wellbeing of others but almost completely silent about our spiritual responsibility towards our brothers and sisters. This was not the case in the early church. Christ himself commands us to admonish a brother who is committing a sin (Matt 18: 15-17). The church’s tradition has included admonishing sinners among the spiritual works of mercy. It is important to recover this dimension of

Christian charity. We must not remain silent before evil. I am thinking of all those Christians who, out of human regard or purely personal convenience, adapt to the prevailing mentality [of silence], rather than warning their brothers and sisters against ways of thinking and acting that are contrary to the truth and that do not follow the path of goodness.

Those communities that are truly mature in faith which are concerned not only for the physical health of their brothers and sisters but also for their spiritual health and ultimate destiny are examples for true Christians to follow. Christians have the prophetic mission to speak out against a generation indulging in evil. Christian admonishment is never motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination. It is always moved by love and mercy, and springs from genuine concern for the good of the other. In a world pervaded by individualism, it is essential to rediscover the importance of fraternal correction so that together we may journey towards holiness.”

The Pope wrote.

Dear parishioners,

What a wonderful celebration we all had last week as we marked Easter Sunday. Our coming together in large numbers was a proclamation of the mystery we celebrated namely the resurrection of the Lord. I thank you all for preparing yourselves through Lent and Holy Week. Easter Sunday was a culmination of what had been going on in our hearts; for this I commend you.

Easter came at a time when our bishops were extremely anxious about the personal response of each Christian towards Jesus Christ and his Church. Archbishop Vincent Nichols asked us to uphold the sanctity of marriage an ordinance that can only exist between male and female human beings. Archbishop Bernard Longley talked to us about the pastoral situation of the diocese and the need to foster and support vocations in the Church. Christians after us ought to receive the gospel that we have received. Let

us continue to reflect on their advice during this Easter time.

Today we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. What would have happened to us if God was not merciful? Who among us can stand to say he/she does not need God's mercy? Well, if you are looking forward to the Mercy of the Lord this is the time; come, so that together we may call on his Mercy not only for ourselves but for the whole World.

The Feast of Divine Mercy comes soon after Easter. It was God's plan to help all peoples to understand the magnitude of sin which brought about the condemnation of Jesus the Son of God. It is only a merciful God who could do the wonders of our salvation in Jesus from incarnation to the Empty tomb.

Come let us adore the Lord of Mercy, come let us learn from him so that as he has shown us his mercy, we may show it to others.

Do you need a Shepherd?

Someone told me the other Sunday that I was the idlest man in Coventry! *“Every time I visit this Church, I find you standing here, and when the Mass is over, again you come to stand here; it seems you have nothing to do in your house!”* Well, I replied what does a person tending sheep in the open country do? He either stands or sits on an anthill doing nothing while the sheep graze!

Like that idle shepherd, I too, like spending time at the back of the church to see my ‘sheep’ coming to church on Sunday. Looking at them and welcoming them is one of the things I look forward to every week. But it does not end there, I also enjoy standing at the back of the church to see them go into the world equipped with the word of God proclaimed at Mass; strengthened by the Eucharist and assured of mutual support from one another.

Fr. Jimmy Lutwama AJ Parish Priest

This Sunday is called Good Shepherd Sunday. It reminds us of the care that Jesus has for each one of us. It is natural to look for persons who can take care of us; that is why we fall in love and create bonds of companionship. It is important that as members of this community we play the role of the Good Shepherd by minding one another.

When the sheep return to the fold, the gate is normally locked but he hurries to open it for them. From there he can count his sheep, take notice of the wounded, the underfed and those that need extra care. The sheep too can know whether their shepherd is happy or not. While some ‘sheep’ might need a little cuddle, others might simply run into the fold.

The Church today needs Shepherds, good priests, holy religious and committed parents in the family home. Do you need some one like that? Then try to make one. You can also help someone to become a shepherd.

WILL YOU HELP ME?

You might have watched the BBC TV programme a week ago which was highly critical of the Catholic Church. The program as such was talking about one member who gravely misbehaved. I learned something. When we are criticised, there are some things we come to realise:

1. We are valued. People criticise others or things because they value them. Criticism of the Church these days should awaken us all her members to challenge our evil ways.
2. We are genuine: the church is criticised because those who criticise her know very well that her message is sincere and unpretentious. In my thinking this is the reason why the Catholic Church, her ideals and call to discipline is more commented on than what others do or say.
3. Faith must be lived in practice. The Church is criticised also due to the fact that many of us her members no longer

practice either what we believe or what we teach. Faith has a lot to do with how we live our daily life. Christians ought to believe what they teach; they ought to teach what they believe and to practise what they teach in their daily lives.

Jesus must be looking upon us here and wondering who among his people you and I is ready to prove that the criticisms labelled against Him and his Church are isolated incidences within his flock!

Because he believes in us, he has created us to be witnesses to him in this critical world. The daily struggle you go through as a believer in God and member of the Church is the very foundation of his presence. Our individual witness to the Christian faith is the only way by which we shall weather the storm. As St. John told us in the second reading last Sunday, "our love is not to be just words or mere talk but something real and active....."

“We will bring them to Justice”

Last Friday was a solemnity of SS. Peter and Paul the two pillars of the Church. These two men brought the light of Christ to the world. Peter was a fisherman but not a successful one. While he would not stand with anyone that would betray Jesus (Jn 13:23-24), he ended up becoming the worst betrayer that Christianity has ever known. Peter was not a good man because he denied Jesus three times on his face (Jn 18:12-27). How could Jesus make him his vicar after such grave misconduct at his hour of need?

What of Saul, a man who dedicated his entire life to **“bring to justice”** the early followers of Jesus! He was resolute, only divine intervention on the way to Damascus could save those he was going to ‘bring to justice.’ I have often wondered how Saul would treat the arrested men, women and children who were weak to travel to Jerusalem to be tried on matters of their faith in Jesus. Would he leave them free or he would exterminate them then and there?

“Bring to justice” is a common word these days among high level politicians; when they use it do the listeners understand its implication? Nevertheless as a Christian it seems to me that ‘Bringing to Justice’ is similar to Saul’s mind set on the way to Damascus. Human justice can be the worst thing to happen to us since it rules out mercy. God’s justice is the opposite because it involves mercy. The Gospel compels us to realize that we cannot depend on worldly power alone for peace and prosperity. Worldly power even when benevolent gives birth to prejudice while worldly success is unfortunately built on the backs of the oppressed. Persons who bring others to Justice are not necessarily just themselves. It is better to be brought to justice by God than by men. When you hear someone saying these words just pray for him for God’s gentle touch.

Why did Jesus establish the Church?

The other day while preaching at a Christian funeral, someone came to me afterwards so disappointed because I had said that *'one of the reasons for the existence of the Church was to prepare people to meet God and that the calling of a catholic priest involves the duty to prepare his people to meet with Christ.'* We're a pilgrim people. But for some people the church is like a bubble without purpose! The truth is that the church is a school where God trains and prepares us for the life of heaven. To achieve this, there are some activities that the church does all the time:

1. Preaching the Gospel, making disciples and teaching all nations Matt. 28:18-20 '
2. Edifying believers: that is building up the faithful in their spiritual life.
3. Worshipping God: the church teaches us to worship the true God and to avoid any form of idolatry. The Sunday Mass, reading the Bible Eucharistic adoration, reception of the Sacraments are all

necessary for the worship of God. The Church is a community a family of believers upholding the same faith and cherishing the same hope.

4. The Church acts as a restraining and enlightening influence in the world. Jesus spoke of it as *'The Salt of the Earth and the light of the World.'* Matt. 5:13-16.

The church should never be obsessed with worldly affairs such as politics or economics or irresponsible scientific research. A church which has its foot deep in these matters soon loses direction especially its prophetic witness. Are you aware that the Catholic Church knows that her lay faithful including yourself are more competent to carry out these duties than her priests? There you are!