



*Dear Friends,*

With this Advent newsletter we send our warmest greetings to ease the chill of these last autumnal and early winter days.

With the shortening of daylight hours and the end of the beautiful colours, we are invited to focus our thoughts on the effect of light in our lives. Ancient philosophers attributed to light seven operations: light penetrates, enlightens, warms and enkindles, enlivens, expands, elevates and makes objects visible i.e. enabling them to be seen as they are. These properties can also be recognised in the soul living in the grace of God, living in the Divine Will; so the grace of God finds its corollary in seven operations in the soul.

Let us consider the fourth property: to enliven which also means to animate and vivify. The created sun calls forth and preserves life in all of nature, so that when the sun disappears briefly at night, life on earth rests: the petals of flowers close, the songs of the birds are hushed, our faculties go into slumber mode, and all living things await the coming day. When the sun withdraws its heat in winter, bestowing its blessings only in half measure, the life of plants is extinguished, and fields and meadows are changed into a bleak expanse until the returning spring, when the full blessing of the sun brings back new life.

The work of grace works even more powerfully in the soul. Without grace, the soul does not have the seed of heavenly life that grows and gradually, throughout life, becomes a glorious paradise bringing life and blossoming into a perpetual springtime. With grace, the soul experiences neither night nor winter, but continually brings forth new blossoms of life in the virtues, even though the old ones do not wither. It brings forth brilliant colours of the fruits that the virtues produce and fragrances of the flowers that it germinates.

That is why the Advent season is such a graced time. We begin a new liturgical year throughout which the mysteries of Christ are celebrated and deepen their effect in our lives if we are open to the transforming work of grace. 'God from God, light from light,' as we say in the Creed. The more we know Christ, the more deeply we can fathom the mysteries of his person and of his life, the more we can prayerfully study the circumstances and details that revelation has confided to us - the more also will our piety be true and any holiness have solidity.



It was to St Catherine of Siena that the Eternal Father deigned to say:

*'Know well, my daughter, that all the mysteries,  
all the actions which my Truth performed in this world,  
with the disciples or without the disciples,  
were representative of what takes place in the intimacy  
of the soul of my servants and of all men.  
You can draw forth from these deeds a lesson and rule for life.  
Let them be meditated upon in the light of reason,  
and the most uncultured minds as well as the most subtle,  
the commonest intellects as well as the highest ones,  
are able to draw profit from them.  
Each can take his share, if he wishes to.'*

Dialogue Hurtard, II, 213-214

If God reveals to us the secrets of his love for us, it is so that we may accept them. In this way, we may enter into the way he sees things, into his thoughts, so that we may adapt ourselves to the eternal plan, outside of which neither holiness nor salvation is possible. This is to see things with faith and to operate in all situations a spiritual discernment that is spiritual and not just natural (which all people are capable of).

As we approach Christmas when we will be celebrating God made man, the Word made flesh, let us ask for the grace to see more clearly what this mystery means for us, to enter more deeply into the wonders of the mystery of the Incarnation. God has really willed to make the humanity of Christ the instrument of grace for all peoples.

*"What is quite evident to me," writes St Teresa of Avila, "is that in order to please God, in order to receive from him great graces, it is necessary - and such is his will - that they (people) pass through the hands of this sacred humanity in whom he has declared himself well-pleased. I have had experience of this an endless number of times and Our Lord has told me of it. I have recognised clearly that this is the door through which we must enter if we want the sovereign Majesty to disclose to us high secrets .... one walks with assurance upon that path."*

Blessed Columba Marmion in his timeless classic 'Christ in His Mysteries' emphasises that if we reflect on the above, we will note that the whole of the supernatural life itself is based on that truth. *"The Church, the sacraments, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, preaching - all these are means imperceptible to the senses whereby God brings us to himself. It is like an extension of the Incarnation."* When we go through the pages of the Gospels or when we follow the Church in her liturgy; when we unite ourselves to the sacred humanity of Jesus by an act of faith and, above all, when we receive his body in the Eucharist, then the sacred humanity of Christ - inseparable from the Divine Word - serves as an instrument of grace for our souls. May our desire be to receive all that God wants to give each of us as the Church unfolds the mysteries of Christ for us during the coming liturgical year.

## News

As usual the Good Lord has kept us on our feet these past two months. There is never a dull moment in COLW and the God of surprises keeps us on our toes with no two days being alike. The mission to the Isle of Man, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Shrine to Our Lady of Rushen was a grace-filled experience for both Sr Gabi and Sr Camilla as well as for the many Manxes they met. A big thank you to Nigel whose inspiration in re-establishing devotion to Our Lady under this title was instrumental in making this happen.

Carina is settling in well and managed to keep her commitment of leading some retreat days, taken on before she joined us at the beginning of October. She is a natural communicator and, together with Sr Theresa, proved to be a big hit in a primary school they visited. The children wrote some wonderful letters and some of the things that most of them seemed to remember from Sr Theresa's talk included: the fact that we are lucky to have a very big garden at Abbotswick, that Sr Theresa can manage to play table tennis and bounce on a trampoline at the same time (multi-tasking..), understanding now the difference between a nun and a religious sister and that we get up very early to pray i.e. 6am. This didn't stop some of them saying that the input made them think that they could be a sister one day. We aim to go to more into schools in the future as it's all part of sowing seeds of hope in young hearts. This will be made possible by the fact that, as we occupy more of the rooms at Abbotswick with new community members, we can only take smaller groups and individual retreatants.

We may have mentioned in the past our idea that all Christians could do with living alongside a religious community for a short period of time. This would be similar to what Buddhists do, when many lay people choose to spend 3-6 months in a Buddhist monastery at some stage in their life. This would enable Christians to go back rejuvenated in their commitment to witness to Christ in today's post-Christian and very secular world. A similar initiative is being piloted at Lambeth palace by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rt Rev Justin Welby, and it brings home the fact that small Christian communities may well become one of the main ways in which Christianity is kept alive in today's world.



Setting off for the mission on the Isle of Man (left) and Sr Gabi crowns the statue of Our Lady of Rushen (right)



With friends and candidates after the Mass opening the Year of St Teresa of Avila (below)



View of the Slipper Chapel and Cottage during an autumn afternoon stroll

We were lucky to have some excellent formation days led by Margaret Tolan (on the role of customs in community) and Sr Mary Goretti (on boundaries and learning how to deal with feelings) so a big thank you to them. Fr Matt Blake OCD, our chaplain who is in ever greater demand around the country as a speaker and retreat giver, came to lead a week on St Teresa of Avila in October and will be leading one on St John of the Cross in December. We cannot thank him enough for all he continues to do for the community. Following an incredible year of discernment

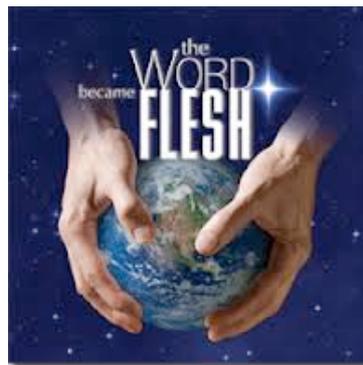
and growth with COLW, Mags has moved on, feeling called to continue her journey with an apostolic lay movement. With the pilgrim season coming to an end at Walsingham, and with more candidates due to join COLW shortly, we will be concentrating on formation during the coming two months. Please pray for us as we consolidate as a group, remembering that even one person leaving or arriving changes the dynamics of a group considerably. Val, our excellent facilitator, will have her hands full over the coming months :-). By the way, as we have more women coming to try out the COLW vocation we have decided that, to protect both them and the community in this mutual discernment process, they would only start signing newsletters once they reach the novitiate stage of formation.

We had a grace-filled visit to Birmingham in early November to lead a day on the spirituality of Our Lady of Walsingham. With Sr Camilla's Italian driving we arrived in good time - so much so that we were able to pop in and say a quick hello to Mother Winsome and her sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a new religious community of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. Although the number of people attending the day itself was small, the group gathered were people the Lord wanted to be there and we were all appreciative of the deep sharing that was made possible. Andrew, the site manager at the Cathedral was unstinting in his exceptional welcome and seeing that everything needed was available. A big thank you also to Canon Gerry Breen for making sure we had a hot meal before driving home. We hope to be able to bring the message of Mary's 'Fiat' to other dioceses in the future so if you'd like us to come to your part of the country please just get in touch.

On this note we wish you and your loved ones every blessing for a Holy and Blessed Advent and Christmas.

With love and prayers from

*Sr Camilla, Sr Gabi, Sr Theresa and Carolyne*



*'Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour  
and give us the strength to grow in love,  
that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence  
and welcoming the light of his truth*

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**