

Dear friends,

It always comes as something of a surprise to realise that the season of Christmas lasts for 40 days and ends with the Feast of Candlemas on February 2nd. The 12 days of Christmas takes us to the Feast of the Epiphany which is the 6th January (twelfth night). However we celebrated Christmas in 2020, I think I can guarantee that it was vastly different from previous years and felt rather 'flat' and uneventful.

We are social beings and we need to gather together to celebrate occasions in our lives and yet, as I write, we are again in 'lockdown' and prevented from mixing with family and friends. It is indeed a strange world which we inhabit at this time. We are all the poorer for it and the need to socialise seems to be more urgent than ever. There are no easy answers and we are going to have to live with this pandemic for some considerable time to come. The vaccine being 'rolled out' offers a glimmer of hope and it's good to know that the most vulnerable in our communities are the first in line to be inoculated. The rest of us will have to wait patiently and take our turn.

Part of the Christmas gospel reminds us that the 'light' has come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it. The symbolism of light and darkness is often used in Christian thought and writing and it does us good to be reminded of it. We've all used the expression, 'there's light at the end of the tunnel' but we never quantify how long the tunnel is! The tunnel of darkness at the moment seems set to be a long one... but there will be light! In our own lives, when we feel shrouded in darkness and overcome with fear and anxiety, turn to face the light; turn and face the one who said 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light' and 'come to me all who are over-burdened and I will give you rest'. The good Lord is our light and when we look at our world and our problems through his eyes, we somehow get a different perspective on our situation.

I've heard it said that the pandemic is God's punishment on humanity for going against his laws..... I love the laws which says that we shouldn't wear mixed fibres and not eat meat and dairy produce together.... no more lasagne or pizza then!! The Bible is humanly constructed and divinely inspired but that doesn't mean it's free from error. To get it right and to understand the true nature of God, he came and lived among us. Moses received the 10 Commandments and the Scribes and Pharisees expanded these to 623 but Jesus, as God incarnate, distilled them into just two: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. No retribution, no 'wrath of God' and no punishment! Love, simply love is the very nature of God. Forgiveness, compassion, humility, vulnerability and acceptance are all qualities of God. He didn't send the pandemic but rather tries to help us through it with the simple message of love.

I began by talking about Christmas as I believe it's central to our understanding of God. Let his light illumine all our hearts and minds.... and to show that he does, light a candle and put it in your window on the Feast of Candlemas.... the darkness will NEVER overcome us.

Yours sincerely

Fr Keith