



The Holy Family of Bordeaux

in Britain and Ireland

Glory to God alone in Jesus Christ through Mary and Saint Joseph

June 2017

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Gemma addresses the assembled extended Unit Leadership Team at one of the live streamed sessions

EDITORIAL

We have all probably heard of the purported Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times”, and mulled over its implications. Most times are interesting but we can certainly say that some, such as the present times, are more interesting than others. Is it a curse or a blessing to be alive today?

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The constant stream of tragic events that are daily brought to our attention cannot be called blessings, but the way ‘ordinary’ people, by their reactions, “become the compassion of God in the world” (K.S) can be so called. The evidence of systemic inadequacies, to put it mildly, in public institutions is said to have led to the phenomenon of populism. This has seen the rise of very different leaders such as Presidents Trump and Macron in the US and France, of political parties like Podemos in Spain, and the rout of the Tory party in Britain. It is indicative of a new mindset in whole populations obliging the governing classes to reassess their policies and actions. How this will shape the future remains to be seen.

It is also an interesting time in the Catholic Church. Pope Francis is re-opening the windows that were almost closed again after Pope St John XXIII threw them wide with the second Vatican Council. Immediately on election, he prioritised the three most serious issues of the moment - climate change, human trafficking, and the refugee crisis - and is matching words with action. Some of his words and actions have drawn, not just criticism but open opposition, but so did those of Jesus.

Our *Holy Family* in Britain and Ireland, regardless of ageing and diminishing numbers, can only draw strength from these interesting times as we wholeheartedly take on the commitments of our Unit Chapter as inspired by the 2014 General Chapter. It’s time to count our blessings as we approach our bicentenary.

Message from Sr. Gemma (Unit Leader)

Hope versus Fear

This month of June has been a momentous month in British politics. Theresa May, in calling a snap general election in the hope of increasing the conservative majority in Parliament before entering into Brexit negotiations, miscalculated badly. Now, she is severely weakened as a leader and Labour's Jeremy Corbyn, who has been consistently vilified by the gutter press and rejected by many of his own front benchers, led a victorious campaign resulting in 232 seats in Parliament having taken many "safe" conservative seats.

While the Conservative campaign played on peoples' fears, hammering home the message that Britain needed "strong and stable" leadership in a time of fear and uncertainty, Jeremy Corbyn offered a more inspiring choice of hope versus fear – "hope for the many and not the few;" hope for a more equal, more democratic, more peaceful and more just world. And isn't this the world God wants for God's people as articulated in Leviticus?

The public responded to Labour's call and for the first time in many years, young people turned out in their masses to vote against a political system dominated by wealthy, special interests. Corbyn's comment on the results says it all: *"I'm very proud of the results that are coming in all over the country tonight, of people voting for hope, voting for hope for the future and turning their backs on austerity."*

Anthony Lanes's very humorous depiction of Jeremy Corbyn as an almost Christ-like figure bringing salvation to the disadvantaged, has an attractive ring of truth. (The New Yorker: 9 June 2017). The Labour manifesto echoes the jubilee theme of God's desire for peace and justice for all God's people.

Justice and God's passion for justice is the single, most important biblical theme. The God of the Bible cares about justice, not as an abstraction but as a concept that is intimately linked to God's love and compassion for human beings. Abraham Heschel puts it like this: *"God doesn't love justice. God loves people". (The Prophets: p. 276).* God cares about peoples' lives and happiness and suffers with them when they suffer: *"I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt and I have heard them beg for my help because of the way they are being ill-treated. I feel compassion for them and I have come to rescue them"* (Exodus 3:7).

Throughout the Bible the plight of the poor and oppressed takes centre stage and through the preaching of the prophets, the people are being constantly challenged to model their lives on God's compassionate love. They are being urged to practice justice towards the land, towards one another, the poor, the widowed and orphan and towards foreigners. The Lord says this: *"Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. (Zech 7:9). "If any of your people become poor and unable to support themselves, you must help them, just as you are supposed to help foreigners who live among you"* (Leviticus: 25: 35).



A Jubilee year as proposed in Leviticus was an opportunity for a fresh start for everyone. During this year all debts were to be forgiven, slaves set free and a more just and equitable society established. In fact the law as laid down in Leviticus recognises the need to radically transform unjust structures that increase the wealth and power of the rich and keep the poor mired in poverty. This is probably one of the most radical texts in the Bible.

Leviticus has much to say to us today in a world where people are still enslaved, where there is an ever widening gulf between rich and poor, where developing countries sink under the burden of crippling debts that they have to pay to richer countries and where people fleeing persecution and war are turned away from our borders. We, as followers of Jesus are called to practice jubilee justice. We follow Jesus who came to bring good news to the poor and who in his teaching tells us that we are blessed and are members of his family when we practice justice. We are blessed when we give consolation to the mourners, feed the hungry, give drink to those who thirst, welcome the stranger, show compassion and care to the sick, and give liberty to those who are oppressed and enslaved. (Matthew 26 32-46).

May we, during this time of preparation for our 200 anniversary, take up the challenge to be jubilee people! May we do what God asks of us: *"practice justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God?" (Micah 6:8.)*



REACHING THE UNREACHED

We live in a world today where we are constantly exposed to the needs and cries for help from those of our brothers and sisters less fortunate than us, from across the globe. Without careful consideration and honest reflection there is a danger in either becoming overwhelmed by the stark contrast in our comparative affluence and access to consumer



goods or responding cynically by turning our face away and blunting our compassion.

I was fortunate enough earlier this year to visit the charity, *Reaching The Unreached* (RTU), in the state of Tamil Nadu, Southern India. Having seen a presentation on their work a number of years earlier, my husband and I decided we would sponsor a child through school for a modest amount per month. I was clear in my own mind that the limit of my involvement would be in sending the money. I didn't feel I had the emotional energy to write letters and engage with a 12-year-old HIV+ girl.

And so it continued for four years until the day my sister invited me on a 3-week exploration of India to include 8 days to be spent at RTU. What resulted was an introduction to the wonderful world of the

children's villages, and so much more. I left with memories of smiles, goodness, generosity and hope.

Founded in 1974 by a De La Salle Brother, James Kimpton, RTU is a secular, far-reaching, service organisation that has been working in the West of Tamil Nadu in South India, offering a range of services to empower some of the most destitute and marginalised people in rural areas. Their main work is with abandoned, orphaned or destitute women and children. They are concerned that they and their neighbours have the right to a decent life, to sufficient, nourishing food, to a safe place to call home, to clean water, to an education and to have a means to earn a living.



In 2016, RTU was able to care for over a thousand orphaned and destitute children in the four children's villages as well as providing practical support to thousands of the poorest rural children and their families, and whole villages in dire poverty:

- 753 children supported in their families so that they can afford to go to school.
- 1,450 children educated at RTU schools, 184 students supported so that they can go through college and 60 graduates a year
- 6,891 children supported in rural schools to increase their educational attainment

- 445 children supported from families affected by HIV/AIDS
- 2,300 village women supported to start their own small enterprises and have a voice in their communities through Self Help Groups
- 77 new houses built for homeless families and 20 new water wells drilled



Brother James is still alive at 93 and lives and is cared for in the children's village of Sirimalar in the tiny village of Kallupatti, the headquarters of RTU.

Is it this then that brought such joy to me during my visit? Well in part, yes, but the lasting memories will be the smiles of children. The abundant love that was

evident everywhere and the joy of life being lived to its fullest. The children and their foster mothers and the barest of accommodation and very few possessions, if any, but they had found safety, love understanding and hope and it shone in all their eyes.

So, there we have it, the compassion and faith of one De La Salle Brother, born and bred in Chester, and thousands of lives are truly affected for the good.



Frieda and Bob Rimmer, friends of the Rock Ferry community

Studies at Heythrop College

I attended the course on Religious life at Heythrop College. This course took place once a month on a Saturday from January to June. So it was on Saturday, 10 June, that we finished the course with a plenary session which ended all the modules.

This course explored Consecrated Life from a wide variety of biblical, theological and pastoral perspectives: we studied the biblical foundations of Consecrated Life, vowed living, the prophetic nature of religious life, its mission in the world and in the church and the personal, community and spiritual dimensions.

Each module was interesting in that it encourages me to share my experience of religious life and to live in constant self-examination. I learned that religious life is constantly moving, changing and flexible. This increases my hope for the future and my trust in the Holy Spirit working in the Church.

The approach to the vows helped me to live the vows as an enrichment in my life, and guide me to a total self-giving to God and God's people; it has also been a rereading of my motivation. Moreover, the course specified how obedience calls each day to radical listening to God, to the Holy Spirit who is working in

the world, listening to the sign of times and our environment. The call of chastity is the engagement to a radical solidarity with humanity. Likewise, poverty calls to a radical sharing and engagement for the poor.

Furthermore, the topic about mission was enriched by diverse experiences and emphasised the theology of symbol. Religious life has to be a symbol of God's presence, a sign of union and charity in the world by

its presence and action. In order to be witnesses and builders of God's Kingdom, religious are not separate from society but proclaim the sanctity of existence and the person. Religious life is a bridge builder between God and people and should

work for a "pro-life stand", and be a radical response to the major issues in life. This topic also explored the "dynamic of presence" which explained the interrelation between "being and doing" and how religious life and people's situation influence each other. Religious life takes that situation on and transforms it; society's situation reflects the quality and the response of religious life which acts in conformity with society's needs.

Sr. Dolcita, Aberdare



AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

There is an old saying, "all things come to those who wait". Many years ago I had a desire to visit the Holy Land, but had long since put it out of my mind. You can imagine my surprise and joy when suddenly in March I was gifted with a ticket for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with the Cambridge group, for one week.



he threw out a fishing net but caught nothing. The trip was all too short.

On the fourth day we moved to Bethlehem. From there we visited the Church of the Nativity and The Shepherd's Fields before going on to Jerusalem, with its many holy places. In most of the places we visited, we had a scripture



Crib at the church of the Nativity

Full of joy and great expectation 30 of us set out from London and were joined in Tel Aviv Airport by 19 other pilgrims from Vancouver. These two groups have been joining up for years with a priest from Cambridge as spiritual director. Our base for the first three days was at the Mount

reading, reflection and sang our hearts out.

Every day we had an early rise but, on the day we were doing the Way of the Cross, the call was at 2.30 am so that we could begin the Via Dolorosa before the shopkeepers got busy with their wares. By 5.30 we were ready for Mass in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, after which we queued to enter the Holy Sepulchre. It was overwhelming.



We had Mass in the Upper Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth on St. Patrick's Day. I had the privilege of doing the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah. Visiting the spot where the Holy Family lived was special. In the beautiful little church in Cana the 11 couples in our group renewed their marriage vows.

One of my favourite experiences of the pilgrimage was the boat trip on the Sea of Galilee. It was so calm, I could just imagine how Jesus fell asleep on the boat. On the other hand we were told that storms can arise rather quickly. We prayed, kept silence, sang and then one of the crew taught us a circle dance. Finally



At the Sea of Galilee

Then it was time to go to the Garden of Gethsemane for a quiet time. I brought back a sprig from an olive tree and, on returning, found that we have five olive trees on the way to church in Clapham! The next day was to the River Jordan where we renewed our Baptismal Promises. Then, on to Jericho and the afternoon was spent relaxing by the Dead Sea, where you are advised to float but not swim.

On the final day, on the way to the airport, we had Mass in Emmaus. Now the Gospel means more to me and I am very

grateful for this precious experience.

Brigid Davis, Clapham

MONEENROE PARISHIONERS' TRIBUTE TO HOLY FAMILY SISTERS

Almost six months after the Holy Family Sisters had left Moneenroe they were invited back on 3 June for a special ceremony in the parish. Those who had lived and worked there, and who were able to attend, were present with quite a few others. They were blessed with a beautiful summer evening, ideal for the outdoor Mass in the cemetery at which



In his homily, Fr. Tobin spoke of the rock which would be a permanent reminder of the *Holy Family Sisters* whose presence over 46 years was as 'solid as a rock'! They were there for the people at all times, especially in times of need. Like the rock which would never be moved, their

memory would live on in the hearts of the people of the parish.

memory would live on in the hearts of the people of the parish.

As the Folk Group sang their final hymn, the birds sang in the trees which formed a lovely enclosure to our *Holy Family* sacred space. Fr. Tobin remarked that 'heaven and earth are united' in singing God's praises for the presence and ministry of our Holy Family Sisters in the parish of Clogh/Moneenroe.'



Salome Devane and Mary O'Sullivan.

A huge stone had been brought from Co. Carlow to provide a permanent altar for all Masses which would be offered in the cemetery for years to come. Opposite the altar, an elegantly designed stone seat was unveiled and blessed before Mass began. A beautiful Holy Family image adorned the bench which was to be a lasting memorial to our Holy Family Sisters who had served in Moneenroe from 1972 to 2016.



For all that has been – thanks!
For all that will be – Fiat!

Sr. Frances Darragh

Photo Journal of Crewe Meeting, June 2017

An innovation at this meeting was the live streaming of two general assembly sessions for the benefit of those who remained at home. Reactions so far were positive.



Fr. Brian OMI, co-director of the Crewe Conference Centre with Sr. Catherine, welcomes the group



Listening, sharing, proposing, facilitating, in the assemblies

UPCOMING EVENTS

July

22 JULY - Death of the Little Father, Amand Noailles (1862

| August 2017 | | | | | | |
|-------------|-----|---|---|-----|-----|---|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| | | 1 Transfer of Founder's body to present tomb (1861) | 2 International Day of the World's Indigenous People | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 International Youth Day |
| 13 | 14 | 15 Feast of the Assumption | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 World Humanitarian Day Commitment of first 7 members in the Vocation of God Alone (1827) |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 International Day against Nuclear Tests | 30 | 31 | | |