

## Advent/Christmas Letter 2020

A year ago, on Advent Sunday 2019, with Parliament in deadlock, continually paralysed by a pro-Brexit government trapped in office by a pro-EU parliamentary majority, we faced the greatest political and constitutional crisis in over 300 years and yet, today, how much worse the situation has become. Who could have imagined, in the midst of that crisis, that within a year we would also be facing the greatest economic crisis in 300 years brought about by a global pandemic and health crisis of such a magnitude that we thought to read of such things only in the pages of our history books. Unfortunately, of course, the present pandemic is not only a health crisis and an economic crisis, it is also a political and social crisis affecting the rights and liberties of a free people living in a democratic society.

We must pray that through these storms we may be given the grace to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. It may be that ( in the providence of God) our other helps and comforts are being taken away ( those ephemeral and material supports ) so that we rediscover the true Foundation of our lives, the only secure and sure Foundation ( 1 Corinthians 3 v 11 ) which is Jesus, the Solid Rock amidst the shifting sands of time. *“ When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, O Thou Who changest not, abide with me”.*

In Advent we have the opportunity to re-evaluate our lives, what our priorities should be, to re-centre ourselves in Christ for He never changes, He is “yesterday, today and forever the same” – “ All things change but Jesus never! Glory to His Name!”

We give thanks that many of us have been able to return to the public celebration of Mass but there are also a greater number who feel it is still too soon to come out of self-isolation and restricted social contacts and it is right that **no one should think of returning to the celebration of Mass until you feel that it is entirely safe and comfortable to do so.** Some of you have not been able to attend church since March, nine months ago. **This letter is to let you know that you have not been forgotten!** It may well be late spring or the early summer of 2021 before the worst of the pandemic is behind us but we must pray that through this “wilderness experience” the Lord will gather us together as in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel – “ and the bones came together, bone to its bone – and flesh came upon them – and the breath came into them, and they lived!” ( Ezekiel 37 v 7-10). We must pray that in coming together, we are re-structured and re-formed, with new longings, an expanded vision and a greater consecration to the One Who casts down and raises up, Who breaks and melts us so that He can re-mould and remake us, and then fill us with “power from on high” ( Acts 1 v 4,5 ) “just as at the beginning” (Acts 11 v 15 ).

Advent is a time of looking forward, a time of expectation and of longing, “ as we await the blessed hope, and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ”. St Peter warns us, and prophesies, that “ in the last days there will come scoffers saying, ‘Where is the promise of His Coming?’ ( 2 Peter 3v4 ). It is interesting to note that there are many more prophesies in Scripture concerning the Second Coming of Christ than His First Coming. These prophesies have still to be fulfilled. We live in that “in-between time”, between the Ascension of Christ in to heaven and His Return from heaven – and the Day of His Coming is drawing ever closer.

When that Day will come, no one knows – “ of that Day, or of that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” ( St. Mark 13 v 32 ), but there will be signs that precede His Return – Jerusalem freed from gentile domination and sovereignty (St.Luke 21 v 24 ); “signs in the sun and moon and stars – for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (v 25f); the earth will be laid desolate ( Isaiah 24 v 3f ); the rise of the Antichrist deceiving the whole world, for “ that Day will not come unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and pretended signs and wonders” ( 2 Thessalonians 2 v 1 – 12) ( see also the Catholic Catechism para 675, “before Christ’s Second Coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the ‘mystery of iniquity’ in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price

of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of His Messiah come in the flesh" – and paras 668-679 ); the armies of the nations surrounding Israel ( Joel 2 v 32 – 3 v 2; Zechariah 12, 13, 14 ); the conversion of Israel (Zechariah 12 v 10; Romans 11 v 25f; CCC para 674); the plagues, wars, famines and earthquakes of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse ( Revelation 6 v 1 – 8; St.Matthew 24 v 7f ) so that God will shorten those days (St.Mark 13 v 20 ) when Christ descends from heaven upon the Mount of Olives ( Zechariah 14 v 4 ) from where He ascended ( Acts 1 v 11, 12 ) accompanied by all the saints in glory, "and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" ( 1 Thessalonians 4 v 13f ).

These days are still ahead of us, and we pray that in this Advent Season our hearts may be quickened and excited as we contemplate the Coming of Christ and a New Heaven and a New Earth, for "the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up", and then St.Peter asks the question, " since all these things are thus to be dissolved, *what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness*, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which the heavens will be kindled, and the elements melt with fire! But according to His promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells ( 2 Peter 3 v 10 -13). Here then is our **Advent Charter!** – lives of holiness and godliness as we "*await* the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ". Advent is a time of watching and waiting, " watch therefore and stay awake for you do not know when the Master of the house will return" (St.Mark 13 v 35 ).

The new creation ( which will emerge from the old creation ) began in the Womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. With her consent, Mary brought Salvation into the world and thus the Angels sang at the Birth of the New Creation on that first Christmas Day ( as they had sung at the birth of our first creation – Job 38 v 7 ) – " Glory to God in the Highest" "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*". "The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth" ( St.John 1 v 14 ) and "to all who received Him, He gave power to become children of God" ( v 12 ). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**, the old has passed away, behold the new has come" ( 2 Corinthians 5 v 17 ).Through this pandemic and through one crisis after another we experience ( ever more vividly ) that this world is passing away, and all the glory of it. The New Creation ( which will succeed this old and dying creation ) has already come into existence – the Church, the Body of Christ ( and thus the "continuation of the Incarnation" ) is the future already present in the collapsing world of our today – we are, already (!) the future new creation which ( after many challenges ahead ) will envelope and consummate the whole earth and the universe at the coming of Christ – " glory to God in the highest!"

As we celebrate, this Christmas, the coming of the Kingdom of God in the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem, we pray that that Kingdom may soon come in all its fullness "as it is in heaven" as we await with eager anticipation "the Return of the King" of whose " government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and over His kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it, with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this" ( Isaiah 9 v 6,7 ). Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

I wish you all a Holy Advent of great longing and eager anticipation and a Joyful and Blessed Christmas. May God bless us all and may the radiant beams of love's pure light shine upon our homes and families and especially upon those who will be alone this Christmas. After so many challenges and difficulties, may the Lord in the year ahead resurrect the Church and renew us ( as in Ezekiel 37 ) and ( as we continue praying for a New Pentecost in the life of the Church ) fulfil in us that other great promise of the last days, " I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Even upon my menservants and maidservants, in those days, I will pour out my Spirit, says the Lord" ( Joel 2 v 28,29 ). Come, Holy Spirit! I wish you a Holy and Happy Christmas.

**P.S. PLEASE NOTE** that ( because of Coronavirus restrictions ) there is a limited number of people who can attend the Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. To be sure of a place, seats are being reserved and therefore you may not be able to attend the Mass of your choice if you have not reserved a seat before arriving.