

# Sisters of Jesus Way



## Advent 2010

Our dear friends,

We send our warm greetings to all our friends with this Advent letter. Our Advent Retreat rapidly filled after our last newsletter went out so we have decided to repeat it the following weekend, December 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup>. We have a few spaces left. It is rather short notice but if you would like to come either telephone us 0151 6258775 or email [sistersofjesusway@redacre.org.uk](mailto:sistersofjesusway@redacre.org.uk)

This year we have welcomed many guests including Christians from different denominations and nationalities. Some need space for prayer. Others are seeking the will of God for decisions that have to be made. Others simply need a place to rest. An Anglican priest visited us. He said that he had felt guilty when he slept so much of the time when he was away on a retreat! He no longer felt that way, as he realised that it was sleep he needed. Rest is what many of us need. We are hoping this next year, as we are able; to make more rooms en suite. We are waiting for our builders to begin work on the first room. We are not sure how long the wait will last!

As we look back on the year there are some outstanding memories. One was the visit of a Muslim who lectured up to university level on Christianity. Despite the influence of Islam we don't meet too many Muslims in our part of the world. Much as it helped him talking with us about Christianity it also helped us to meet him.

It has been a special joy to be visited by some of the children, now adult or on the verge of adulthood, who came years ago to our Family Weeks. Another day our garden was filled with children. We were the final stopping point on a pilgrimage they were making. We hope that many of them will remember their visit here in future days, that Jesus makes you happy and following him is quite the best way to live.

Another memory is one of our Quiet Weekends where the stillness and peace were so tangible that it filled the house. We sometimes find it difficult to take the plunge into quietness. The Lord rewards those who seek him and put him first and many of the participants in our Quiet Weekends give testimony to that. Our Walking and Praise Weekend was later in the year. It rained and rained. We managed to evade the worst showers. Even when the dog had had enough and collapsed with exhaustion after a bracing walk to Hilbre, our hardy walkers took it all in their stride! The dog recovered the next day to accompany them on a new walk for us, climbing high above the estuary and then dropping down to Parkgate for one of its famous ice creams. We praised the Lord for the beauty of his creation.

Like many of you we have had an upsy, downsy sort of year from which we are just emerging. Suffice to say that we seemed to be continually beating a track to our local hospitals! The Sisters concerned are all recovering now. We want especially to thank the many dear, kind friends who helped us keep on track through difficult days. We could not have managed without you.

The run up to Christmas has begun. How can we keep in touch with God throughout Advent when we feel overwhelmed by shopping, card writing, wrapping presents not to mention who has what? Then there are extra activities, many of which we enjoy but it all crowds our days. Where is Jesus in it all? How do we hold on to him and keep our minds from going into overdrive in the run up to Christmas. One bit of good news is that we don't have to hold on to God. He is not going to let go of us! We are held in his loving heart.

There is a very beautiful prayer that Jesus gave us. It is called the Lord's Prayer. Most of us know it by heart but if we don't it can be written down. You will find it in Matthew 6:9-13. It doesn't matter which version we use, ancient or modern. It is a prayer that most Christians can recall without difficulty. This year we have led a number of groups

where we have shared that instead of going through this prayer at breakneck speed it can be broken down and become the pattern in our prayer times.

It can also be a helpful pattern of prayer to help us through Advent. What happens when we are standing in a long queue at a Supermarket not to mention the Post Office, becoming increasingly frustrated and impatient? We are not exactly at our spiritual best! To begin to say the Lord's Prayer will bring us back again in our thinking to the loving heart of God. There are many other occasions when we can pray the Lord's Prayer. When we are stuck in traffic for instance because everyone it seems has chosen exactly the same time as us to be on the road! We can find ourselves at Christmas parties where we don't want to be and feel like a fish out of water.

Christmas Day can be the worst day of the year for some. They are desperately lonely without family or friends. We look enviously at families but the day is anything but harmonious for many families. Sometimes anxieties increase as the day approaches. Relationships become strained. We have had friends say to us that they were dreading the organising and the cooking of the Christmas meal. For us dread would be too strong a word but it certainly takes some organising for our numbers!

How can the Lord's Prayer help? Don't recite it to yourself quickly and without meaning. Break it down. For instance as you say, "*Our Father in heaven*", let the holiness and love of the Father enfold you. It doesn't matter if you get no further –linger there and even the Supermarket queue will become holy ground. To continue with the next phrase deepens the awareness of his Presence, "*hallowed (holy) be your Name*". Seeking his Presence is not first and foremost our needs being met; it is giving the Lord the place of honour in our lives. There is the knock on effect that as we pray it begins to calm us.

"*Your kingdom come, your will be done*" is the prayer as we look around us with dismay at what Christmas has become. Whisper it at the office party or the family get-together on Christmas Day. "*Your kingdom come, your will be done*" here and now in this place, Lord.

"*Give us today our daily bread*" is the humble prayer of those who are dependent on the heavenly Father for everything. It is the prayer of a child, those who live in simplicity. It brings us back to our needs rather than our greed. As we look at the abundance of material things surrounding us we can pray this phrase of the Lord's Prayer for those who have not. "*Lord, give them today their daily bread.*" This will also knock things back into perspective for us.

"*Forgive us our sins.*" Our impatience and frustration as we stand in the queue at the Post Office needs to be forgiven along with every other sin that seems to be part and parcel of this time of year. The Lord loves us too dearly to let us off with, what is after all, bad behaviour.

"*As we forgive those who sin against us*". There is no way that we can worship the little Christchild if there is someone we have not forgiven. We should ponder this phrase deeply and listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

Finally, "*lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil (the evil one)*". Temptation is always knocking at the door but at Christmas there are some powerful, extra temptations, such as eating too much, drinking too much, buying presents that we can't afford, taking on too much. We become overtired and thus tempted to be irritable and short tempered; the list is endless. The Evil One rides in. Most of us need to pray this phrase of the Lord's Prayer with fervour and trust that, as we pray, we will be protected both from ourselves and the prevailing atmosphere around us.

Begin in the middle or the end or the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, it doesn't matter. Take one phrase or the whole prayer, that doesn't matter either. It will make a difference. Remember that it isn't the Lord's Prayer that saves us. It is Jesus. There is no extra merit in repeating it. What repeating it does do is remind us that we are held in the loving heart of God and we are his children. It is like a boat in a turbulent sea. It is the prayer that Jesus gave us.

We are conscious too that some of our friends are facing serious illnesses or have faced recent bereavements. The Lord's Prayer is there for you too. It doesn't matter if you get no further than "our Father". That is sufficient. It needs no effort when you can hardly form words and the Father is our comfort in every distress.

A blessed Advent, Christmas and New Year,

The Sisters of Jesus Way



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