

SISTERS OF JESUS WAY

Advent 08

“Our strength, our peace, our joy, our hope, our trust is in the Lord.”

Our dear friends,

Much has happened since we wrote our summer letter – most notably the bursting with devastating speed of the credit bubble and the subsequent consequences. Not having a mortgage and depending on the heavenly Father as we do for our finances, we have always believed that it was his will that we didn't use credit as a means of purchasing. We have waited until we had the money before we bought anything or embarked on building schemes. As a consequence all that has happened has not affected us, as it has affected many people. Although we admit that we experienced a missed heartbeat when it looked as if the NatWest was going under and we were not sure where we would stand with a charity account! Then faith and common sense re-asserted themselves. We have had nothing in the past and the heavenly Father has provided. If we had nothing again, what did it matter!



We are however aware of others who are and will be affected as the country slides into recession. It must be a devastating experience to have your house repossessed, to face redundancy or be living so near the edge financially that Christmas only brings added anxiety. Fuel bills are a constant source of worry in many homes. We haven't mentioned debt – a living nightmare for many. All this in turn causes strained and broken family relationships.

It is one of those situations where it is easy to apportion blame. Perhaps the Lord is calling us to tread a different path and offer help. Why not help those in debt by directing them to the many Christian organisations that are now working in this field. You may even feel called to train to become a debt counsellor yourself.

For those of us in this situation who are the “haves” as against the “have-nots” the Lord calls us to be generous and compassionate. Many of us will know someone personally who has lost their job. Why not buy them the same amount of food you will be buying for your family this Christmas and New Year and give it as a gift, anonymously if possible. Our heavenly Father is generous; he calls his children to be generous too. The Lord says, “I command you to be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”ⁱ Many Christians give generously to charities at this time of year and that also is part of our giving to God but it should not be allowed to blind us to the need on our own doorstep that we personally can do something to alleviate.

We are cushioned in the Christian family. We still have problems and even tragedies but we are never alone. We have the Lord but we also have each other. A man e-mailed a BBC current affairs programme recently saying that he had not said more than “hello” to anyone during the last ten years. The impression was that even the “hello” was not a frequent happening. Those of us who are inundated with Christmas cards find it difficult to imagine the pleasure that it will give someone to receive even one card. Why not see if there is someone like that near you and send that card?

It has been our privilege recently to meet some asylum seekers. We had no idea what they were facing. They were well educated; some of them Christians, dear, dear people. The treatment they had received in our country was almost unbelievable – it was so disgraceful. We had been approached by a Christian charity in Manchester reaching out to asylum seekers asking if we could help in any way – the obvious one for us was a day out by the sea. It has been an eye-opener. Scripture has much to say about the treatment of aliens in our midst. “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens.”ⁱⁱ It is easy to be influenced by the popular

press and helping asylum seekers is never going to be a vote winner. But as we were reminded in a recent “Sundays at Seven” at St Mary’s Church, as Christians we are different, we think differently, speak differently and act differently. Our God has commanded us to love the alien amongst us. He has also commanded us to love the poor and needy.

Since we ourselves had a brush with cancer some years ago we have been aware of the trauma this illness can bring not only to the one who is ill but to those around them. We were painfully aware that many people trying to say the right thing said the wrong thing! At the same time we were aware that as Christians we had a different take on cancer. It was notable that some of the greatest help came from those who had been through the experience themselves. In view of all this and our subsequent involvement with cancer patients, both Christian and non-Christian, we agreed to co-found with Pat Nickson, an associate vicar from St Mary’s, a Christian cancer support group. The group meets here at Redacre on the second and fourth Fridays of each month in the afternoon. What do we do? It is very informal; sometimes we simply talk and talk! We pray. From time to time we may have a speaker or a meal together. It is a privilege to belong – we have rarely before been in a group where there is so much love, understanding and freedom.

The summer passed quickly as we led various weekends and greeted a kaleidoscope of visitors. Two Melanesian Sisters stayed with us for a week and some Brothers joined them one evening. We were encouraged by the childlike simplicity of their faith – something that we find far too easy to lose. We were moved as the Brothers shared with us the story of the martyrdom of seven of their number. Yet we were conscious that God in allowing this tragedy had in some way granted them a great grace. There were lighter moments too, much laughter and singing from both our communities. One lasting memory will be, as the Sisters were about to depart, holding hands with them and singing, “We are one big happy family----- God’s family are we.”

We have also been privileged this year to have contact with a Korean church in Manchester. It is amazing who turns up often quite unexpectedly at our house. Life may be full and busy but one thing is certain, it is never dull. We have long had a burden on our hearts for North Korea and prayed much for the church there. Year after year this country heads up the list of violations against human rights. Remember and pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ suffering torture and death in that land (and elsewhere). Both pastors had links with North Koreans. We saw it as a special gift from the heavenly Father that we could be more informed and show love in a practical way, which we will be able to do, as well as support through our prayers.

We were also pleased to welcome again an Anglican Benedictine Sister from the Community of the Holy Cross. Another Sister from a different Anglican community accompanied her. They had the only week of good weather this summer! We were a sight to behold sitting outside the café in Thurstaston talking non-stop one sunny morning, one attired in a long black habit, another in a modern grey habit and two of us in our blue dresses and scarves plus the dog who takes everything in his stride if it means a walk. In the few years that we have known the Holy Cross Sisters they have been an unfailing source of encouragement. In some ways it may seem strange that an Evangelical community such as us should draw so close to a community in the High Church tradition but our unity comes from our love for the Lord Jesus and His way of the cross. This transcends any differences in worship and theology.

We are privileged to share with Christians from many parts of the Christian Church. The Lord Jesus has his ambassadors in numerous places. We could share more but space does not permit.

Amidst all the activity, whether that is hospitality or building work, the daily rhythm of prayer continues. Our strength, our peace, our joy, our hope, our trust is in the Lord.

May God bless you this Advent,

Sisters of Jesus Way

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- i Deut 15:11
 - ii Deut 10:18-19
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