

Our dear Friends,

We send our greetings to each and every one of you. May the light of Christ shine in our hearts these dark, wintry days.

We thought that we would share with you first what may be called, “the nuts and bolts of the kingdom” – those many necessary tasks that enable the work of God. They are indispensable just as the cleaning in churches is indispensable but seriously underrated. We are grateful to all those who have helped us with our “nuts and bolts” this last year.

Our 91 year old librarian has had to give up on the grounds of ill health! Sister Nora has done a wonderful work in our library for years, faithfully coming each week. We will miss her. We are grateful that another friend has taken on this job. We are also grateful for friends who sat for hours and hours cataloguing our books onto a computer.



From time to time a more major “nuts and bolts” task faces us. The “time to time” seems to occur with alarming frequency with us! However this year a major step forward was taken when some of our bedrooms were converted to en suite. Our builders arrived at the beginning of August. It was not the best time for us. We knew that if we asked them if they could come back when we were not as busy they would disappear into the nether regions for a further ten months. So we commenced five weeks of chaos. We had many visitors. As one left another arrived. In the middle of it all we had a health and safety inspection. Our builders kept assuring us that there was nothing to it but conveniently found work elsewhere that day. The window cleaners also decided perhaps it wasn’t the best day to do our windows and departed in haste. We alone were left! Who said that we led a quiet, withdrawn life here? The builders returned the next day and have now departed for a season. We are grateful that we now have more en suite rooms. The relationship with our builders long since passed into friendship and some of the Sisters were pleased to sing at a service when the boss and his wife renewed their marriage vows this year.

Environmental health followed hard and fast on health and safety. Here we had no warning. The Sister who answered the door had no way to warn our cook as she showed our visitor into the kitchen. To her great credit the Follower of the Lamb Sister who was cooking that day registered only slight shock (not what she was feeling) and calmly carried on. Never has the kitchen been as hushed as fridges were opened, freezers peered into and paperwork inspected. Two Sisters who were going to pop into the kitchen for a chat were unceremoniously reversed back from the doorway. Our visitor accepted the offer of a cup of coffee. Even that takes on a different dimension when environmental health is there in person. One slight slip was made - the coffee mug was put down in the wrong place. Oh dear! But the outcome of this, our first inspection, was that we are in the five star bracket. Five star is the highest possible. Wirral are about to implement what is already happening in many parts of the country and eating places are going to have to display their certificate. It was decided that this would not be appropriate for us. We are quite disappointed about that! It would have been great to show it off!

One offshoot of our inspection was that at least two Sisters when they were on holiday this year looked at every eating place to see if they were displaying the coveted five stars before they entered. One owner behind the counter told us to be especially aware of anywhere not displaying a certificate. So there is a hint for you.

It is not only important and necessary that practical work is done but that it is done in the right way and with the right attitude. Life, as we all know, is more than the “nuts and bolts”. We have recently quoted St Francis de Sales in our church magazine. Here is another quote worth remembering. “Be conscientious in all you are called upon to do, but do not let hurry, upset, anxiety and nervousness get in the way of common sense and good judgment, and prevent you from doing well what God calls you to do.”<sup>i</sup> For that we need the Lord. One further word from this saint, “You cannot keep your peace by losing it.”<sup>ii</sup>

Sometimes we are in need of a time of refreshing – “times of refreshing --- from the Lord”, as the writer of the Acts of the Apostles describes it.<sup>iii</sup> There are many fountains from which we can drink and reading is one of them. Some of us have found help in going back to some of those writers who inspired us when we were younger. Phrases still linger in our minds. When Sister Lynda died last May some words read long ago in a biography of Amy Carmichael by Bishop Frank Houghton came reverberating back. They were, “God has trusted us with a great trust”. We knew that he had trusted us too with a great trust.

We searched for the biography in our library as it was catalogued as being there. It was not there. We do lose books. (Perhaps this should be the second hint in this letter! If you have a library book that hasn't been returned could you send it back please?) We widened our search to Amazon. There was no trace. However reading a later biography of Amy Carmichael by Elizabeth Elliott there they were – the exact words, “God has trusted us with a great trust”.<sup>iv</sup> Amy Carmichael was a missionary in India who had founded a community that rescued temple children. In her latter years she was an invalid and the day to day running of the community was in the hands of others. The leader of the work for boys was someone she trusted and respected. He was much younger than her. He had suddenly collapsed and died. Moreover this was now the third time that premature deaths had taken future leaders from her. Yet the next morning she wrote to her beloved community, “Our God trusts us to trust Him ---- let us not disappoint God. Let us rise to this great trust”.<sup>v</sup> Elisabeth Elliot comments that there must have been “searing” questions crowding Amy’s mind as her hopes for the future collapsed but she resolutely turns from them.

Some of you will have seen the film, “Of Gods and Men”, portraying the moving struggles of a small community of Cistercian monks in a remote area of North Africa. Militant Islamists moved into the area. The Brothers knew that they could leave the villagers who depended on them and be safe or they could stay and face almost certain death. The blurb on the DVD case reads, “In the face of terror, their greatest weapon was faith”. We may use the word “faith” or the word “trust” but it is the same. “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith”.<sup>vi</sup>

We are leading our Retreats and some Quiet Days as Advent approaches, on Mary, the mother of Jesus. We have looked again at this sensitive, spiritual woman called by God to bear the Saviour of the world. She was warned of suffering to come by Simeon when she took her eight-day old son to the Temple. “A sword will pierce your own soul too”.<sup>vii</sup> Did those words reverberate in Mary’s mind when she saw the growing hostility of the powerful Sadducees and Pharisees towards Jesus as he embarked on his ministry? How utterly human she was when she sought to protect him by drawing him back to the safety of the family. The path God chooses for us is not always the path that we would have chosen for ourselves nor sometimes is it the path we would have chosen for those we love. So it was for Mary and so it is for us.

For Amy Carmichael we see a resolute turning into trust possibly many times, but for some, like a number of the Cistercian Brothers, it was a struggle through to faith. Mary in the birth narratives has a quiet trust that does not hold when Jesus begins his ministry. Later we see her resolutely at the foot of the cross. We all travel different paths but there are some constants. Faith or trust is a choice that we make not once and for all but many times. Yet as with so much else in the Christian life, it is also a gift from God. In embracing the cross we are sustained by the Christ who died on the cross. In giving the Father our trust, we are held in his arms of love.

A new year will soon be dawning. May the Lord give each of us his grace so that we honour him and show our love for him by trusting him. Should suffering or tragedy cross our path, may we remember Amy Carmichael’s word, “Our God trusts us to trust Him ---- let us not disappoint God”.

May the Lord bless you and keep you close to himself,

Your Sisters in Christ,

Sisters of Jesus Way



Rejoice – a Saviour is born

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- <sup>i</sup> Set Your Heart Free Francis de Sales (pg 14)
  - <sup>ii</sup> Set Your Heart Free Francis de Sales
  - <sup>iii</sup> Acts 3:19 NIV
  - <sup>iv</sup> Amy Carmichael, Her Life & Legacy Elisabeth Elliot (pg 367)
  - <sup>v</sup> Amy Carmichael, Her Life & Legacy Elisabeth Elliot (pg 367)
  - <sup>vi</sup> 1 John 5:4 NIV
  - <sup>vii</sup> Luke 2:35b NIV

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