

Sisters of Jesus Way

Advent letter 2014



Our dear friends,

First of all – many, many thanks to all of you who have helped us this last year. We are so grateful to the Lord because he always sends us help when we need it – from eighty-plus-year olds briskly slicing our runner beans in the sunlounge to slightly younger ones in the kitchen, the assistance has been wonderful. Support with the housework has also been a blessing, as well as in the library, the office and the garden. We could go on and on but the Heavenly Father knows each one of you. We are also grateful to all of you who have regularly supported us financially. (On a practical note, could anyone who gift aids with us and who is now not paying income tax please let us know.) We also have a friend who has developed to a fine art the ability to find bargains at the supermarket when the prices are reduced. Often there is a ring of our doorbell and meat, far better than we would normally buy, is given to us. So each year the Heavenly Father takes care of his children and every year we have sufficient to make improvements, sometimes quite expensive improvements, to Redacre and its surroundings.

Soon, and probably by the time this letter reaches you, we will have new floor covering in the corridors upstairs and downstairs in Redacre. We have chosen marmoleum on the ground floor. The firm we contacted have been very helpful. It is difficult to describe the colour we have chosen, a mottled light green with flecks of orange. You will have to come to see it! Upstairs it will be carpeted – a warm and restful lilac/blue. That has been in the pipeline for some time, but what wasn't, was a new electric cooker.

It all began when an engineer called to give us a safety certificate for our twenty-year-old and trusty gas cooker. He immediately said that it was unsafe, new government legislation etc. - how often we hear that phrase, new health and safety regulations! The problem was ventilation. It was either: remodel the kitchen and relocate the big commercial cooker, or use electricity. We felt at that stage it would be cheaper to go for a new cooker and it was purchased. However we subsequently discovered that our electrical supply was inadequate to support the extra demand there would be on it. So now Scottish Power will be digging up the road (at our expense!), our builder digging up the drive, our electrician rewiring inside the house and E.On changing our meters! One visit from a gas engineer to give us a certificate was now going to cost us about £10,000. But the good news in this story is that the Heavenly Father knew and before it happened we had unexpectedly been given gifts that would cover it. So please don't reach for your cheque books. We have told you this story to show the grace and goodness of God. It is not our way ever to ask for money and on that path for many years we have been safe in the care of the Lord. However these major improvements bring extra work for us and so at this point in our letter we want to thank especially those of you who pray for us. We are sure that your prayers have blessed the ministry here day in and day out.

The number of hits to our website www.redacre.org.uk rose spectacularly this last year. We hardly need to remind you that helpful thoughts for the day, up-to-date information and beautiful pictures can be found there. While we are on the subject of technology, thank you to all those who now receive this letter via email but can we remind you that there are other members in your family who might like to see it! We have found that the paper copy circulates better. If, of course, you would like a paper copy to give to someone, do contact us.

If you still have Christmas presents to buy, then our book, "To Love You Only", and our C.D. "Come Lord Jesus", are still available. We are in the midst of a re-run for the C.D. This means that in less than two years only, just short of one thousand copies have been distributed. By the time this letter goes out we will, hopefully, have another thousand. The book was launched very quietly exactly twelve months ago, at a low-key box-opening in our dining room, with a few guests. The boxes are going down steadily and we are sure that at some point there will have to be a re-run for this too. We have been encouraged and heartened by the letters and emails that we have received about the C.D., or the book, or both. They have travelled far geographically and also deep into the hearts of those who have listened to "Come Lord Jesus", or read, "To Love You Only". Our only desire with both is that the Lord Jesus is honoured.

Our retreats are filling very quickly so please don't wait too long before you book or you will be disappointed. At other times we try to keep a room for those who want to come for a few days at short notice. Our system fell through in August, September and even October so we do apologise to those of you we had to refuse.

We have learned over the years to appreciate and love the church year. We look forward in expectation to the great story of salvation once again being recounted as Advent approaches. We have written our own simple liturgies for the different seasons. It was with something of a shock, a number of years ago, when we realised on Boxing Day that it was the Feast Day of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. After all the discarded wrapping paper, the Christmas lights, the cosy feel of an open fire in our dining room, the tinsel and the glitter, it felt like a dose of reality. We didn't ponder it too long but it seemed out of place. We hastily put together a service.

Then the answer came. One day in October, with the sun feebly smiling through the clouds, three of us drove up the tree-lined drive of Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight. Set in large grounds the peace of the presence of God seemed to have clothed the land. With great restraint we did not turn to the left to watch the baby piglets but made for the buildings. There we saw a bookshop! It was excellent, with a wide range of Christian books. One of us picked up a little book on Advent and Christmas. These were talks that had been given by Pope Francis in his first year of office. Beautiful in their simplicity and love for Jesus, his writings spoke to us. One little address was entitled, "On the Feast of Stephen"¹. "In the joyful atmosphere of Christmas, this commemoration may seem out of place", he commented. We agreed with that! He continues later, "The remembrance of the first martyr immediately dispels a false image of Christmas: the fairy-tale, sugar-coated image, which is not the Gospel". "In the martyrdom of Stephen (we see) the same confrontation between good and evil, between hatred and forgiveness, between meekness and violence, which culminated in the Cross of Christ."

A truly Christian life will produce antagonism in some people. We will be wrongfully accused and need not be surprised when this happens. In fact the gospel suggests that if it doesn't happen we should be surprised. "Woe to you when all men speak well of you",² Jesus said. These are not comfortable words, especially to those of us in the West. As you read this, probably someone, somewhere is being martyred for Christ. It has rightly been said that, "Persecution does not make martyrs, it only reveals them".³ Already in their hearts they had died to self and were living for Christ. This is the path for all of us.

The cross is at the heart of our faith. The church wished to emphasise this for each of us. The stoning of Stephen by furious men is recalled straight after the celebration of the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. It is Christ who brings us peace and joy, but along with this he calls us to take up the cross. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."⁴

"But all through life I see a Cross,
Where sons of God yield up their breath:
There is no gain except by loss,
There is no life except by death,
And no full vision but by Faith,
Nor glory but by bearing shame,
Nor justice but by taking blame;
And that Eternal passion saith,
'Be emptied of glory and right and name.'⁵

With our love,

The Sisters of Jesus Way and Brother of the Way.

¹ Advent and Christmas with Pope Francis

² Luke 6:26 NIV

³ Source unknown

⁴ Luke 9:23 NIV

⁵ From Orlig Grange by Walter C Smith – quoted by Frank L Houghton in "Amy Carmichael".