

SISTERS OF JESUS WAY

Advent 2005



Our dear friends,

It is time once more for our Advent letter. There is always a thrill of expectancy as the Church year once more begins its momentous story. We love the candles in the chapel, the glow of the lights on the tree in the hall and most of all taking our little Christchild and placing him where he is a daily reminder to the friends who call in with their Christmas greetings that this is what Christmas is all about. We are so blessed as Christians; no one else can celebrate Christmas, as we will. There is something strong and permanent about this season, unchanging and grounded in the great salvation story of our faith. We hear the wonderful story of Christ's coming year after year yet never tire of it. No one can take the joy, peace and expectancy from us.

In the changing world around us this is not so. Many, endeavouring to be politically correct, are taking the Christ out of Christmas. It isn't only at Christmas. The week we write this we heard on the News that the curator of a museum was removing AD and BC because he said, we have people from all over the world. We could smile except it is so sad and in a way pathetic. So we find ourselves in a society where we are a minority. Yet in its own way it is a "wake up" call for us to change, to be bold, to speak out and hold our ground. The day of the respectable churchgoer is coming to an end because it will no longer be respectable to be seen as a Christian.

Change comes in many forms and we are not always very good at handling it, hence the resistance to change in churches, for example. It comes in many guises. There are changes over which we have no control and there are changes we ourselves initiate. How we re-act often shows where our priorities and therefore often our security lies. Yet, we know as Christians that there is only one source of security and that is our God.

Some of us will have been shaken by changes in our circumstances this last year. Events have overtaken us at an alarming rate and over these we have had no control. There has been a death in the family, and as well as the grief, there is a new loneliness to face. The joy of Christmas only accentuates our loss. We may have had to face redundancy, divorce, bankruptcy or a serious disabling illness. There is a feeling of unreality, can this really have happened? All this is change at its harshest. Where else can we turn but to God who is the heavenly Father who counts our tears and holds us in his warm embrace? "O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

Change is part of life. If we are honest many of us must admit that we find it difficult to cope with a common cold never mind something serious. Recently we had made plans to visit two other communities. These visits were necessary. The date drew near and with a sinking feeling we realised that quite a minor illness in the scale of illnesses looked likely to disrupt all our plans! Reluctantly we rang the community which we were due to visit first and cancelled. Hope still triumphed over despair however, and we thought a few more days would solve the problem and we would still be able to visit the second community. The day arrived and we set off. We travelled all of forty miles of the two hundred miles that we needed to cover and we had to bow to the inevitable and turn back. But something beautiful happened as we eventually turned the car in the direction of home, a rainbow appeared in front of us. Moreover the sisters in Redacre whom we had to phone also saw a rainbow arching over the house. Even when we are reluctant to see our plans collapsing and having to be changed, the heavenly Father still loves us. He takes us through the disappointment and the feeling that we are letting others down. We are human; we feel these things but the Lord restores us to the place of peace.

What about the unwelcome change that comes when relationships fall apart? Perhaps the whole situation started with something quite minor. One day recently we had a little crisis in relationships. It can happen sometimes! It began with moving furniture from our dining room, as the next week we were going to restore the floor, sanding and preserving it. A sister found herself with about six things to do at once and as she was the lead sister in that situation and directing others who became impatient, the tension began to mount! At about the same time another

sister came in tired from our large fortnightly shop. Her exasperation at all that had happened when she was out added to the general sense that things were beginning to fall apart!" We did some serious talking at lunchtime. We call it a Fellowship in the Light. Calm was restored until teatime! Weary after a busy day not to mention the tension, we suddenly found ourselves disagreeing about the time. Several watches varied by a few minutes; everyone had the correct time – impasse. At this point the sister, who had been slightly detached from the morning events and had been able to guide the community through the Fellowship in the Light, snapped! She has a habit of not being able to remember what she says when this happens although it is usually eloquent but she does remember bringing her hand down with some force on to the table.

You may be relieved to read that we were all still friends the next day and the next morning a chastened community worked calmly and lovingly with each other! It need not be a disaster when there is friction in our relationships; with the Lord there is a way through but the heavenly Father does insist that we begin to change inwardly. Like some other areas of "change" we can resist. Yet, it is the only way not only to please God but to find peace in relationships. It begins with an honest acknowledgement of our own faults not someone else's, a willingness to change and the grace of God to enable that to happen. This is so important that we can't sufficiently emphasise it. Often as Christians, we are failing to change inwardly and therefore outwardly.

Sometimes change does not overtake us, we initiate it. Change must never be simply for the sake of change. Some of us excel in this, always restless and unfulfilled. When we initiate change it is in obedience to the Lord. This obedience may seem costly or even painful. When it is there miracles begin to happen. One of the privileges that we have in Redacre is that we meet Christians who have stepped out in faith in obedience to the Lord. We cannot recall one who has regretted it. We sometimes look in amazement at all the Lord has given us but it began many years ago when we stepped out not knowing where we were going or where provision was to come from. Many friends thought we were making a mistake. We risked change out of love for Jesus. Do we regret those anxious, difficult years? We do not. The Lord has led us by a sure path. He is faithful.

Change can become more difficult when we are older. We would not describe any of the sisters as being of advanced years but the years are certainly advancing! When recently we were facing the fact that we were seriously running out of space once again, the building work, which will begin in January, did not fill these sisters with the enthusiasm that it once would have done! Those of us who are older must not stifle the enthusiasm of those younger than ourselves and hinder change. Some church councils or committees and congregations can be predominantly older folk. There is a danger in this and one day we will be accountable to God if we have resisted the Holy Spirit by our refusal to allow change.

From our windows we can see the River Dee as it slowly wends its way into the sea. Sometimes when we are out, we see our river in other places, busy with pleasure craft in Chester or clear and beautiful as it runs with abandon under trees and over stones, under bridges, through little towns. Near its source it tumbles down hillsides, sparkling in the sunlight and turning into a torrent in the rain. The river is always changing and there is life. We have ponds in our garden. One day in the hot summer, we awoke to find some of our fish lying on the surface – dead. The still waters had become stagnant and could not sustain life. Now an air pump bubbles cheerfully into the pond, the water is moving, change and life abound. If we are not willing to change we will stagnate. This spells death.

None of us know what the New Year will bring of those changes about which we have no choice. There is a hymn beloved of an earlier generation and perhaps, by some of us, "In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear". The eternal truth of our loving God is unchangeable. In him we are secure.

As for the changes where we have some choice may we gladly and cheerfully choose to follow the Holy Spirit wherever he leads.

May the unchanging Christmas story bring us hope and courage for the year to come.

God bless you,

Sisters of Jesus Way

