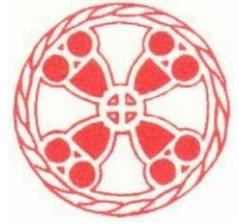


PASTORAL LETTER 8/3



from Bishop Jonathan Goodall
to the parishes and clergy of the See of Ebbsfleet

24 November 2020

Daily Prayers for the weeks of Advent

THIRD WEEK: from Sunday 13 December

Dear friends, dear brothers and sisters:

Each month now I have sent a letter to you to help encourage you and assure you of my prayers for you in our unprecedented situation. This month, the month of Advent, I want to invite you to do something different. I want to invite you, clergy and people of the parishes in the see of Ebbsfleet, to join in prayer with me as your bishop, prayer that is both personal and shared, so that we can be more united in heart and mind during the remaining weeks before Christmas. Each day—whatever the news, whatever is happening in daily life— please make space, either as part of your present prayer, or at another time, to read the daily Scripture verse from your Bible, and say the prayer ... slowly. (I've added in brackets the daily Gospel passage for those who prefer that). I shall say it each day at 12.00, perhaps after the Angelus, and I hope you will join me. May the Lord help us, despite all the fuss of our pre-Christmas lives, and the worries and bruises of the pandemic, *to focus our eyes on what is truly essential*. And I hope that this opening meditation will remain with you throughout.

Meditation

Every parent—especially every mother—yearns to see the face of any child that is being carried in the womb. It is a long process of expectation and waiting; it involves a longing and a desire that can no more be stifled than it can be stopped. Mary and Joseph and their small family circle must have longed and desired to see the face of Jesus in just this way – perhaps even more so given what had been prophesied about him. Mary was, we sing in one Christmas hymn, “Most blest to bring to human birth / *the Long-Desired of all the earth*’. During Advent, in some of our most loved hymns, the Church too remembers and sings about her longing and desire to see the Lord’s face when he comes again, and in our Christmas festivities we celebrate that we will not be disappointed: we *will* come to the goal of all human life — that is, to see God and be united with him for ever.

But for now it is like we are blind, like the ‘two blind men sitting by the roadside’ (in *Matthew* 20.30-34) who, ‘when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”’ Commenting on this passage in a sermon St Augustine says, the goal of ‘all of our work in this life’—all our Christian discipleship—‘is to restore to health the *eye of the heart* so that God may be *seen*’. Restoring to health the eye of our hearts. This is the purpose, he says, of the Sacraments, the preaching of the word, all our training and effort to live a good moral life, and all the changes that have to happen in our lives so that we may be rid of whatever prevents us from seeing God. That is also the purpose of these prayers.

Return to the Eucharist

From early Advent we will be able celebrate the Mass again together. Please *go* to church. Do not neglect to *gather together*. St Paul is always urging Christians *not to stay away* from the Eucharist. We need it! so that, although the Lord will come suddenly to those who cannot see, like a thief in the night (see *1 Thess* 5.4), 'we shall see him as he is' (*1 John* 3.2).

Yours devotedly:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "+ Jonathan Crossfield". The word "Jonathan" is written in a cursive style, and "Crossfield" is written in a more stylized, cursive script. A small cross symbol is at the beginning of the signature.

13 December – **Third Sunday of Advent** – Read *Philippians 4.4* [or Gospel: *John 1.6-8, 19-28*]

Enter our lives anew

O JESUS, help us to be glad with the joy that you give us when we allow you to enter our lives. Enter our lives anew and invite us to go out to the margins of life and proclaim the gospel with joy and courage! Help us discover true joy—the joy of making of our self a gift, of reciprocating the great gift that we have first received, without merit of our own. Amen. (Pope Francis)

14 December – Monday, Week 3 – Read *Jeremiah 24.7* [or Gospel: *Matt 21.23-27*]

Be with me

O GOD, help me to find ways to be alone with you, to speak to you, to listen to you, to ponder your words deep in my heart and so be renewed and transformed. Fill me with your grace, which makes me do all things with joy. Amen. (St Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

15 December – Tuesday, Week 3 – Read *Jeremiah 19.13* [or Gospel: *Matt 21.28-32*]

Finding myself in You

O GOD, I cannot hope to find myself anywhere except in you. All my existence, my peace and my happiness depend on discovering myself in discovering you. If I find you I will find myself, and if I find my true self I will find you. Amen. (Thomas Merton)

16 December – Wednesday, Week 3 – Read *St John 14.27* [or Gospel: *Luke 7.19-23*]

The peace of Christ

O GOD, when I am painfully conscious of turmoil, help me remember that Christ's love has made itself vulnerable to all that hatred can do and has conquered hatred; and as the life he gives is a life that has been through death and proved the stronger, so the peace he gives is much more than an absence of stress. Amen. (Maria Boulding, OSB)

17 December – Thursday, Week 3 – Read *Psalms 118.24* [or Gospel: *Matt 1.1-17*]

Thanks for your good gifts

O GRACIOUS GOD, thank you for the good things of life. Help me always to appreciate the goodness of the world and the joyfulness of life, to rejoice and be glad for all the great and small pleasures that come to me from you through creation. Amen. (Richard Rohr, OFM & Joseph Martos)

18 December – Friday, Week 3 – Read *St Matthew 13.31-32* [or Gospel: *Matt 1.18-24*]

Relishing my insignificance

O GOD, help me to recognize the real miracle of Christmas: that Jesus came to us as a child so that we might come to understand not only that nothing we do is insignificant but that every small thing we do for love of Christ has within it the power to change the world. Amen. (Joan Chittister, OSB)

19 December – Saturday, Week 3 – Read *Philippians 2.5-11* [or Gospel: *Luke 1.5-25*]

Witnesses to your Love

Lord Jesus, whom we contemplate in the poverty of Bethlehem, make us witnesses to your love, that love which led you to strip yourself of divine glory, in order to be born among us and die for us. You, O Prince of peace, you, O Savior born for us, be with your Church on the road which stretches before us into the future! Amen. (Pope St John Paul II)

Week 3 *The prayers have been drawn from the following published works:* St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Total Surrender* (Walker & Co, 1993) Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions, 1961) Maria Boulding, OSB, *The Coming of God* (Canterbury Press, 2001) Richard Rohr, OFM & Joseph Martos, *Why Be Catholic?* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1990) Joan Chittister, OSB, *Becoming Fully Human* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005)