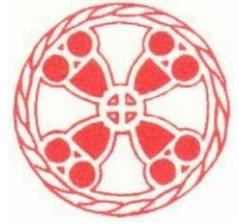


PASTORAL LETTER 8/4



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

24 November 2020

Daily Prayers for the weeks of Advent

FOURTH WEEK: from Sunday 20 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 Bessie" in a cursive script. The plus sign is at the beginning, followed by the name "Jonathan" and the surname "Bessie".

20 December – **Fourth Sunday of Advent** – Read *St Luke* 10.21 [*or Gospel: Luke* 1.26-38]

Send us your Spirit

LORD JESUS, I thank you that you have revealed to us the depths of your boundless love. Send us your Holy Spirit so that we may experience the healing and liberating power of life in union with you and that we may play our part in lightening the suffering of others. Amen. (Bernard Haring, CSSR)

21 December – Monday, Week 4 – Read *Isaiah* 55.6 [*or Gospel: Luke*.1.39-45]

You are near

O GOD, as Christmas draws near, it is easy to forget your nearness as I rush around pre-occupied. Help me to slow down and recognize the opportunity to sense your nearness. Let me look for signs of your nearness so that I may enter into the joy of the season. Amen. (Joyce Rupp, OSM)

22 December – Tuesday, Week 4 – Read *Psalms* 96.12-13 [*or Gospel: Luke* 1.46-56]

Silence before the Mystery

O JESUS, help me to live in day-to-day fidelity to mysteries I do not fully understand, to wait in hope, waiting for the mystery to unfold, going on doing ordinary things but all the time listening, learning, pondering, growing and energetically serving—to be silent before the mystery. Amen. (Maria Boulding, OSB)

23 December – Wednesday, Week 4 – Read *Psalms* 77.11 [*or Gospel: Luke* 1.57-66]

Witnessing to Your Presence

O GOD, help me not to grow lazy in the faith but to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that you work for us. Help me to become a living sign of the presence of Christ in the world, to witness and help open the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end. Amen. (Pope Benedict XVI)

24 December *Christmas Eve* – Thursday, Week 4 – Read *Titus* 3.4-7 [*or Morning Gospel: Luke* 1.67-79]

Jesus, our Peace

O JESUS, help me to accept, with total openness of spirit, you who for love made yourself my brother. You came to bring to the world the gift of peace, which is the precious gift of Christmas. You are my true peace. You knock at my heart to grant me peace—peace of the soul. May I dedicate myself each day to building in every situation an authentic culture of encounter and peace. Amen. (Pope Francis)

25 December *Christmas Day* – Friday, Week 4 – Read *St Luke* 2.8-14 [*or Dawn Gospel: Luke* 2.15-20]

Sharing the Mystery of Christmas

Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into our hearts this peace for which we sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give us. Help us know one another better, and live as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. Amen. (Pope St John XXIII)

Dear brothers and sisters:

*I offer you my warmest good wishes for Christmas,
praying that the celebration may renew your hope for the future.
May our Lord Jesus Christ be with you throughout 2021.*

With every blessing:
+JONATHAN

Week 4 *The prayers have been drawn from the following published works:* Bernard Haring, CSSR, in *Journey to the Light: Spirituality as We Mature*, ed. Ann Finch (New City Press, 1993) Joyce Rupp, OSM, *Inviting God In* (Ave Maria Press, 2001) Maria Boulding, OSB, *The Coming of God* (Canterbury Press, 2001)