

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

*Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for a bed*

In the early hours of the morning, a new-born child is wrapped in swaddling clothes and gently laid on a bed of straw. There he lay, so small, so weak, so vulnerable, so helpless, while his mother gazed lovingly at him in wonder and awe. When we are born, we do not choose to be born nor do we choose how or where and to whom we are born, but this helpless little child did choose to be born to this chosen maiden in this humble setting. This virgin mother who was especially chosen by God freely accepted the responsibility of giving birth to and caring for this child. Even the step-father willingly accepted the challenge of looking after and providing for this holy family.

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus, laid down his sweet head.*

Humble shepherds who had been tending their sheep became aware of this wonderful event and were drawn to that stable and they too stood silently and watched, their hearts full of joy. How could such poor and uneducated people know or understand what was happening? Wise and wealthy men who had travelled hundreds of miles from far distant lands bearing gifts fit for a king were guided from above to this shed in this little town to pay homage to this little baby. Even they, wealthy and wise, did not understand, yet they fell to their knees on that dirty cattle shed floor and worshipped him. For this child was God.

*Hark, the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.*

Here on earth two millennia later, we too find it hard to understand how the Almighty God who created everything that is could lay in such poverty, so small, so helpless, so vulnerable. It is impossible for us to envisage the greatness of God or the magnitude of his love for us. But he, this little child at the end of his life here on earth, again chose to be helpless when he allowed himself to be arrested, tortured and nailed to a cross to die a slow and hideous death for our sake and to prove his love for us. O Lord, if only we could become like little children, so innocent, who accept without question the love of a parent.

*Hail the heaven-bound Prince of Peace!
Hail the son of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings
Risen with healing in his wings;
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Borne to raise the sons of earth,
born to give us second birth.*

O Jesus, make me innocent like a child that I too may accept without question your love for me.

A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

*Lord my God
Help me to love you with all my heart
And to love all men as you love them.*

It is very easy to become complacent, in fact, it is hard, in a long-term relationship, not to become complacent. Usually, when a couple have been together in a loving relationship for a long time, they come to know each other intimately. They each recognise and appreciate the good qualities in the other that first attracted them and brought them together and strengthened the love they have for each other. They need to take care that they do not become so used to one another that they do not each begin to take the other for granted. In their early years, when they were young, they could not spend enough time together. When separated, they could not wait to be together again. As the years go by, they share each other's problems and overcome them together. The love and the trust they have between them also grows stronger. Each comes to rely on the other and is confident that she/he will always be there for them. Their love has matured but they are still young at heart and try to find little ways of showing it, not by buying presents for after decades together they realise that they have all they need and while they have each other they have all they want. So, the gifts they give are little acts of love.

So it is in our relationship with God. When we have known him all our lives, we are in danger of taking him for granted. When we attend mass, we sometimes lose focus and allow ourselves to be distracted and forget the wonderful thing that happens in every mass. We become complacent. We need to remind ourselves that complacency leads to laziness and presumption. We must never stop trying to be a better person; never stop seeking to attain holiness. God loves us and is constantly watching over us but we must never stop making the effort ourselves, expecting God to do it all.

I am not very good at saying prayers. When I say the well-known prayers which I was taught when I was a child, the distractions come flooding into my head and sometimes, I even begin to fall asleep. I find it hard to meditate. In my advancing years, I think my attention span is failing. That is why I find my daily routine of attending Exposition of The Blessed Sacrament, Morning Prayers and Mass so important. I try to focus and participate in every part of the mass. It gives me focus at the start of each day. Throughout the day I then try to follow the example of Saint Therese of Lisieux, "The Little Flower" and follow her "little way". I am not boasting for I know how feeble I am and how I often put things off until later because I don't want to make the effort and how often I fail to do the things I could and should do. My first prayer when I awake each morning is a thank you to God for waking me to a new day and one of gratitude for all the graces and blessings which he has bestowed upon me throughout all my life. During the day I try to say little prayers such as when things go well, I say "Thank you Lord"; When things are difficult or awkward, I say "Help me Lord"; When I endure inconveniences or irritations, I say "This is for you Lord". When inappropriate thoughts come into my mind, I say "Pleas Lord, take them away".

O Jesus, you have given me so much and done so much for me
And I have so little to give to you in return.
I have only myself and I offer myself to you;
All that I am, all that I have, all that I do.

THANK YOU, LORD!

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought, by day and by night,
Walking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

A short while ago, I was thanked for one of my reflections but the person who thanked me also thanked God for giving me such a gift and I agreed with her for I know that when a thought comes into my mind, often during mass or when I am saying prayers, I begin to think about it for some time before writing anything on paper. However, after making a few rough notes and planning what I'm going to say and praying for guidance that God will help me to complete it, when I finally start writing, the words that go down on paper are always different to what I originally thought. It is the Lord who puts those words into my mind.

I am not claiming to have a hot line to heaven. I do not think that I am a bad person but I know that I am not yet a saint. I am just an ordinary pilgrim struggling to find the right path and to do the right thing and endeavouring to lead a good life but so often failing. Yet I believe that God is with us at all times, watching over us, guiding us, messaging us but so often we fail to see or hear or feel his presence. Our inner receptors are not tuned in to receive his messages. I think that all the little occurrences that people put down to coincidence are perhaps, God's emojis, little things that have some meaning. I sometimes look but do not see, listen but do not hear and am so preoccupied with mundane things I do not sense the presence of God. When I see a beautiful sunset, I do not always see the splendour of God's creation. When I hear a beautiful piece of music, I fail to appreciate the wonderful gift that God has given to the composer. When I see a sad face or a homeless person living on the streets, I do not sense the tragedy in that person's life or recall the cruel suffering passion of Jesus.

We are now in Lent, a time to review our lives; to look at all the failings and missed opportunities. On the first Sunday of Lent, the gospel told us how Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert for forty days to fast and to commune with the Father in silent prayer and to resist the temptations of the devil. In the following weeks the gospels tell us about the Transfiguration of Jesus, his insight into the life of the Samaritan woman, the curing of the blind man and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. During these forty days of Lent, I will try hard to learn from the gospels; to practice a little self-denial and to find some extra time to pray; to look and try to see God in all things around me; to listen and try to hear His voice in every sound and in every word that is spoken to me; I will try to sense His presence in every person I encounter. God is love but He hates every sin that mankind commits, yet He never stops loving the sinner. God does not reject the sinner; it is the sinner who rejects God. And I will say to Him,

O heavenly Father, thank You for all the blessings and graces You have bestowed upon us. I am sorry for all the times I have offended Your infinite goodness and I offer this day in thanksgiving for all Your gifts and in reparation for my sins for which I am truly sorry.

*Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in my dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

THE ONE WHO HAS GOD LACKS NOTHING

*Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you
All things pass away
God never changes.*

*Patience obtains all things
The one who has God
Lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.*

Prayer of Saont Teresa of Avila

Lent is over. During Holy Week we meditated on the passion of Christ. We remembered the night before He died when Jesus took Peter, and James and John to the Garden of Gethsemane. He asked them to stay and watch while He went on a little further to pray. Jesus was so distressed He sweated blood for he knew what was to come not only in the next few hours but in the millennia ahead. In a short while Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, prosecuted, humiliated, cruelly tortured, condemned and executed. Even so, as he hung from the cross in agony, his first words were of forgiveness and reconciliation. To his Father in heaven, he pleaded "Forgive them for they know not what they do!" To the criminal to the side of him who had acknowledged and confessed his own guilt and begged forgiveness, Jesus promised "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

During the Lenten period, we have practised self-denial and self-discipline and we tried to follow the example of Dismas to whom Jesus made that promise. We reflected on our own lives and recalled our own faults and failings. But now it is Easter and Christ has risen. It is time to celebrate but we must not indulge ourselves for we still live in a very troubled world and in very troubled times. There are people who commit terrible crimes, perform heinous acts who seem not to have a conscience but I think that most people are good at heart and do have a sense of right and wrong. We are most fortunate to have the grace-giving sacrament of reconciliation which gives us the humility to acknowledge our shortcomings and the hope to look forward to a life beyond death. So let us celebrate in prayer and thanksgiving, for the promise that Jesus made to Dismas also includes us if we are faithful to his teaching. Let us not fall asleep like Jesus' apostles did in the garden. Let us stay awake, always praying, for there is so much to pray for. But when we watch and listen to news reports on the television or the radio and see the terrible destruction caused by war or hear of dreadful acts of violence and abuse or listen to the words of aggression between world leaders, let us not despair. God is still with us. God does not break his promises. We have only to put our trust in him.

I think that, perhaps, now at my age my sins are more sins of omission; the little act of kindness which I could have done to make someone happy; the phone call I could have made to someone I know is lonely and would have been cheered to hear a friendly voice but I didn't make it; the little job I put off until tomorrow because I didn't feel like doing it today and as we all know that tomorrow never comes; The idle times I could have used to say prayers but didn't feel in the mood to do so. I think that the sins of omission are the ones we tend to forget. My Easter resolution is to try harder to overcome these failings.

O Lord, Heavenly Father, thank you for all the blessings and graces You have bestowed upon us. We are sorry for the times we have offended your infinite goodness and we are resolved never to offend you again.

IN SPITE OF IT ALL

*I have counted the cost of the years that are gone,
All the battles I lost and the few that I won,
And the plans that would dawn that I somewhere mislaid,
And the hopes that were born, and the dreams that decayed.
Still in spite of the loss and the labour in vain,
Still in spite of it all, I'll start over again*

I have lived a very sheltered life. There have been some hard and testing times; times when I have not known where or who to turn to, but always there has been a solution, often one that has been very surprising. I take no credit for finding the answers, they have always been presented to me; God has always provided. Everything I have has been given to me. God has not made me rich but has always given me more than enough. For that reason, I have never craved for material possessions, I have put my trust in the one who watches over me. I am happy with my life and satisfied with what I have, what He has given to me. I have never studied Philosophy or Theology and my only formal religious education was that which I received at St. Anne's primary school and at St. Anselm's grammar school where I attained an O level GCE in RE plus countless homilies I have listened to, given by numerous priests over the many years I have lived.

*Lord, I thought that I knew all the questions you'd ask,
What you'd want me to do, ev'ry truth, ev'ry task;
And your word seemed so near, and your light seemed so strong,
And the road seemed so clear that you called me along.
Still in spite of the hopes time has carried away,
Still in spite of it all, I will walk in your way.*

I was born at the beginning of WW2 and grew up in the post-war period of hard times for most. A time when the whole world was recovering from the dreadful effects of the war and trying to rebuild. We knew the rules, what was right and what was sinful but we were the young generation, we could change the world. We were not going to suffer like our parents had suffered. We would build a just society, one that cared for all. I am much older now but I am not sure I am much wiser. There are so many problems in our modern society. The planet is suffering yet we seem to be doing little to help it recover. Political correctness seems to rule our lives making us afraid to say what we believe in case we are branded as being part of some form of unacceptable ism. All over the world, unborn babies are aborted and we are not allowed to protest; social media has become an uncontrollable monster; I feel that we are constantly being manipulated by the television, radio, and the press and being coerced into accepting what we have always thought was wrong. I worry about AI (artificial Intelligence) becoming so advanced, who will be able to control it and who will control those who are in control of it. These issues and many more I find difficult to understand and I do not have any answers for them but I know that I must not judge and I must treat everyone I meet whatever colour, race, creed, or sexual orientation with love and compassion, understanding, respect and honesty.

*I had mastered it all, all my answers were true,
But when I heard your call all your questions were new:
All the ways that you came, the disguises you wore,
you were just not the same, not the same any more.
Still in spite of the loss and in spite of the pain,
Still in spite of it all I will find you again.*

(Kevin Nichols)

O Jesus, My Lord and My God, I know there are many demons in this world but you said "do not be afraid," and I know also that you are the Good Shepherd and are watching over us. Help us to be faithful to your word and to put all our trust in you.

THE SENSE OF SIN

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.

On the front page of our weekly news sheet there is a section which quotes small pieces from Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli Tutti which I always read. I wondered if I would be able to find the book on my Kindle. I could and I did and am now slowly working through it. I have also received and am reading a CTS booklet called "Finding forgiveness with Pope Francis." Fratelli Tutti means brothers and sisters all which means that every human being is created and loved by God no matter what race or culture or religious belief. Yet our world today is so divided, our cultures so alien to one another, our intolerance so great. How can we solve the severe problems that our planet is facing if we cannot work together. In the booklet the Holy Father is quoted as saying that the name of God is Mercy but that mercy only makes sense if we have not lost the sense of sin. He quotes Pope Pious XII who, after the end of WW2, said that that the tragedy of our age is that it has lost its sense of sin and the awareness of sin. When I think of our world today, the divisions and conflicts throughout our world, I am distressed. When I think about how heads of states, politicians, people in public office think and behave, I am shocked. When I think about how children and vulnerable people are being used and abused by organised criminal gangs, I am horrified.

I listened to a homily given by Bishop Robert Baron in which he stated that the word paraclete comes from an ancient Greek word meaning gathering, bringing together, joining and that the original meaning of the word Diablo is separation and division. When I look at how our world is today, I realise how busy the devil is. He is setting East against West, one religion against another, culture against culture when we should be pooling our resources to bring about a better, fairer and a safer world where the sick can be healed, the hungry can be fed, the homeless can be sheltered, children can be safe and all peoples can live in freedom. It is only The Holy Spirit, The Paraclete, that can help us do that. We must turn to him and plead with him to help us change the world. Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, he warned us of the dangers that lay ahead but told us not to fear but to trust. Satan may be powerful but God is almighty.

Individually we can do little or nothing to change what is happening globally but we can change how we are towards those we meet in our own little world. I was once accused of being over-scrupulous but I believe that any act, great or small, which offends God is sinful and to recognise it, confess it and be sorry for it, is in my opinion a prayer that pleases God. I believe that it is not so much the grand gesture but the frequent little acts of love that pleases God most. At the beginning of mass each morning, Fr. Francis asks us in a moment of silence to be aware of our shortcomings and our failings and ask the Lord for his pardon. I try to extend this throughout the day for I know how weak I am and how easily I am distracted. I think I need to go further and be proactive. Bear Grill's Great-great-grandfather, Rev. Lionel Ford, headmaster of Harrow school, in an address to a gathering of scouts said, "how easy it is to be unintentionally cruel, so easy that unless we go out of our way and take steps to be intentionally kind, we most of us will often be unintentionally cruel." That is a mantra I can appreciate.

O God, who by the light of your Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

SUFFICIENT TO OUR NEEDS

For those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but for those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. Matt. 13:12.

I have had a good life, a happy life. All I have has been given to me. There is nothing I have ever done nor can ever do to deserve what God has given to me. There was a man from this parish, a very successful man in his career but a very humble man, whose name I cannot, at this moment, recall but I can remember something he said, "I have been blessed with a lack of ambition." I think I understand what he meant. I know that God loves me for what I am, not for what I have done. My life has not always been easy but I have put my trust in God and he has never let me down. There is a hymn which Fr. Francis often uses to begin mass,

*Glory and praise to our God who alone gives light to our days.
Many are the blessing he bears to those who trust in his ways.*

I think that God gives us all certain talents, gifts to use not for material gain but to serve him and to serve those around us. I have always believed that if whatever I am doing, I honestly do to the best of my ability the rewards will follow. God will provide. He has always given me sufficient to my needs. If we can be satisfied with that sufficiency, we can be happy, we need nothing more. Those who feel it is not enough can never be happy for enough is never enough. There is always more to be desired. The advertisers tell us we deserve more because we are worth it, but are we? Is it wrong to have ambition? I remember at school how we were taught about perfect contrition and imperfect contrition. If we are contrite purely for the love of God, that is perfect contrition but if we are contrite because we fear God's punishment, that is imperfect contrition. I think there are two types of ambition, selfish ambition when we use all our natural talents to enrich our own lives and unselfish ambition when we use our talents to help others. Where would we be without the great scientists and physicians who dedicated their lives to finding ways to make things better for humanity.

I think that is what is wrong with society today. Many have turned away from God and use their natural talents for their own ends. I am happy and grateful for my life but with that happiness there is also sadness for those who do not have what I have; who do not have sufficient for their needs; those who are homeless; those who are hungry and thirsty; Those who are suffering and dying from the effects of global warming or are living in war-torn countries. I am tempted to ask why does God deny these people but I realise that God does not cause bad things to happen; God does not cause wars. It is greed and a lust for power and the consequences of decisions made by human beings that bring about these tragedies. It is time for us to turn back to God and to put all our trust in Jesus our redeemer. Let us be ambitious, not for our own ends, but to bring about a better world where Justice and peace reign. Let us start in our own little world with those around us and put our trust in Jesus and remember what he told us,

Come to me all you who are laboured and overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light. Matt. 11:28-30

SUFFICIENT?

*How awesome is the sight,
Our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the lord
Is shining in this place.*

I am now at an age when every day I am more aware of my mortality. It is not that I am anxious or depressed or even expecting God to call me any time soon nor am I afraid of dying for I know it is simply a fact of life. I know that God is merciful, generous, and kind, and forgiving. All my life I have tried to be faithful to him, to do what I thought was right and to avoid what I believed to be sinful. I have been much blessed and have been surrounded by good people who have been an example for me to follow and who have guided me along the right path. If I am true to him, I know that God will not desert me in my final hour.

God is love. There is no-one he does not love. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven. By his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has made salvation possible for all. It is not God who rejects us but we who turn our backs to him and refuse to accept his love and forgiveness when we put ourselves and our own selfish desires before him. Jesus has redeemed us and given us the promise that there will be a life after death with him in his kingdom. What then is there to fear if we put all our trust in him?

It is not dying that concerns me but that awesome yet awful moment of death when I will stand before him and see and understand the greatness and perfection of God yet at the same time be aware of my own imperfection and how, throughout my life, I have done so little to deserve his love. As when Jesus walked on water and called Peter to him, Peter stood on the water but soon his little faith failed him, so when Jesus stands with arms outstretched calling me across that great divide, will my faith be strong enough? Will the grace within me be sufficient to make me reach across to take his hand and to surrender to his embrace. I earnestly pray that my soul will be ready.

I do not know or understand what purgatory is. I do not think that it is a place or a time. Perhaps it is that moment when I fully realise my unworthiness to enter the Kingdom. At mass, when I approach the altar to receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I pray that I may receive him with complete faith, hope and love; absolute trust and utmost humility and gratitude. Every day I pray to Our Lady of Perpetual succour to help me and never allow me to be separated from God.

O Jesus, may I lead a good life;

May I die a happy death.

May I receive you before I die.

May I say when I am dying:

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph,

I give you my heart and my soul”.

THIS PARISH

We have lived in this house here in Neston and worshipped here in St. Winefride's church for the last fifty-five years. I do not know if that qualifies us as Nestonians, although I do have an aunt and uncle buried in St. Win's graveyard. Our children all attended our parish primary school and received the sacraments here in our church. Even some of our grand-children were taught in our school and worshipped and received the sacraments here in our church. If that does not qualify me as a Nestonian, it must surely class me as a St. Winian. I love this church and this parish.

A few weeks ago, I was asked about an old parishioner William Garrigan who died in 1995 and is buried in our graveyard. I was asked if I knew of any family of his still lived locally. Unfortunately, I could not answer that question but I do remember Bill very well. He was a member of the Knights of St. Columba when I joined the sodality. It was when Fr. Briscoe was parish priest here in St Winefrides, a group of men came together to form a council of the KSC. Among them were Louis O'Sullivan (the first Grand Knight of the council), Griff Griffiths, George Rowlands, Tony Morton, Jim Grace, Bill Garrigan, Alex Connolly, Gordon Nugent and Ron Jones. These were some of the group but there were one or two others whose names I cannot recall. When I joined the sodality, I was the youngest member of the group Alas, all of these have passed and are no longer with us. Their wives were all members of the Catholic Women's League. I hold all these people in great esteem and feel very grateful to them for they started me on my journey of service to this parish.

At that time, I was a very shy person and lacking in self-confidence. These people encouraged me and helped me to overcome my reticence. After a few years I was elected as grand knight and so was required to chair the monthly meetings and to read at our monthly mass. I have been a regular reader ever since up to when Covid closed all places of worship. FR Briscoe invited me to help prepare children for confirmation and later Fr. Courell asked me to join a small group of catechists to help parents of children who were being prepared for first Holy Communion. He also asked me to be one of the first group of Eucharistic ministers. I went on to various other jobs such as bell ringer and greeter, sacristan and member of the choir. Fr. Ravi encouraged me to start writing my monthly reflections and during lockdown Fr. Paul asked me to increase them to a weekly reflection. I take no credit for anything I have done, it has been a great privilege and a joy to have been a part of this parish and I thank God for giving me the opportunity and the means to serve it. There are many people, both men and women, in this parish to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

There is a prayer I have said daily for how long I cannot remember, nor can I remember where it came from. It is this:-

O Jesus , you have given me so much and I have so little to give you in return. I have only myself and I offer myself to you, all that I am , all that I have and all that I do, but I am weak and timid. Give me the wisdom to know what is the right thing to do and the strength and courage to do it.

It pleases me to see others doing things that I am no longer able to do but I remind myself that there are a few things that I can still do and I will try to do them better. The deterioration in my eyesight prevents me from being able to read fluently and although my hearing has also deteriorated, I have been given hearing aids that allow me to hear clearly every word that is read from the lectern and every word that Fr. Francis says in his homilies. So, I can listen and I can still think rationally (I hope) and I can still sing in tune (I hope) and I can still pray for all my friends and loved ones.

St Winefride, pray for us. St. John Plessington, Pray for us. St. Anthony, pray for us.

TURMOIL

*O God, come to Our aid.
O Lord, make haste to help us.*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to The Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Our world today is in absolute turmoil. Every day we here of atrocious crimes being committed against innocent people, women, men and children in countries that are at war and all around the world. It is as if humanity has learned little if anything over the last two thousand years. It has advanced in industry and technology to an alarming degree which we are unable to control, yet we have not learned to live in peace and harmony or care for each other. Our planet is self-destructing yet people are more concerned with what their neighbour has and they themselves are missing. There is so much greed, envy, intolerance, malevolence and falsehood.

Why are all these horrific things happening in our world and how has our society become so corrupt? Why does evil seem to be getting the upper hand? I believe that most people are good at heart but they have turned away from the one true God and have found false gods to worship such as money, power and the latest technology. They no longer have time to stand and stare, to see and to listen. They are losing the awareness of God and His creation which allows the forces of evil to taken advantage. While people are turned away from God, they can no longer receive His blessings and protection and the impious are able to spread their lies and make excuses for their horrific acts. We who still have that awareness of God in our lives must turn to him and beg him to help us share that awareness with those who have lost it.

Recently, I have been reading about post-modernism and nihilism. I have admitted many times that I have not studied philosophy or theology and I do not find it easy to understand these topics. For as long as I can remember, I have had an awareness of God. I think perhaps since I received Holy Communion for the first time. There are times when I have tried to ignore it and follow other paths, but deep within me, I have not been able to deny Him. Whenever there is a problem and I do not know what to do or say or even write, there is always a scripture reading at mass that reassures me. My faith has always been uncomplicated. I believe in God; a loving, merciful, omnipotent God; a creative God. How else could anything have come into existence? I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to live and die for us so that we could follow his example and learn to live with and love one another. I try hard to be faithful to his teaching yet I know that I am still a sinner. There are so many opportunities to help others that I do not take advantage of.

*Glory and praise to our God
who alone gives light to our days.
Many are the blessings He bears
to those who trust in His ways.*

NOT AN END, A BEGINNING

*Merciful Saviour, hear our humble prayer,
For all your servants passed beyond life's care;
Though sin has touched them, yet their weakness spare.*

I was so very impressed with Bishop Mark's pastoral letter on the feasts of "All Saints" and "The Commemoration of the Faithful departed." I too have been saddened by the recent trend and constant commercial advertisement of pure cremations and no fuss funerals. I was only thirteen when my dad died. It was a terrible shock but I think the thought that he was in Heaven and praying for me was how I was able to get through that time. Even now, seventy years later, it still comforts me. Whenever someone close to me dies, I am consoled by the fact that there is another soul in heaven who loves me and is praying for me. Every night, I remember my mum and dad, my two sisters, my brother and two brothers in law, a nephew, a very dear cousin and many more. I pray for their eternal rest and I pray to them, asking them to pray for me and my loved ones.

There was an elderly lady to whom, for a few years, I used to take Holy Communion. She was cared for in a Nursing home and suffered with dementia. It was not easy to have a conversation with her as she seemed to live in the past and was always expecting her mum and dad to come to see her, however we did talk about her early life in Mayo, Ireland where she was born. Although she had no short-term memory, when we began the communion rite, she was able to pray with me and remembered every word of the prayers "Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be." Towards the end of her life, she was bedridden and could not communicate at all. She just lay with closed eyes as if asleep, but as soon as I stood at her bedside and began to pray, there was always the slightest response, the slightest movement of her lips or her fingers which told me she was aware of what was happening. Her funeral mass was held at St. Winefride's but only four people attended, Fr. Courell who celebrated mass, the organist, a representative from the care home and myself. Fr. Courell was not a singer so I sang the hymns alone and felt honoured to do so but sad that there was no one else to remember her long life here on Earth and to pray for her eternal life.

When people arrange a no fuss funeral or pure cremation where no relative or friend attends, to me it seems as if they are turning their backs on the deceased as if that person no longer matters. They are not only denying the deceased but also the existence of God and His promise of salvation. I know it is hard to watch the coffin of a dear one being lowered into the grave or disappearing behind a closing curtain but we should pray for the strength to do so. If that person mattered to us in life, she or he matters even more in death. That loved one has left the mortal body but the soul lives on and needs our prayers as much as we need its prayers. It is also important for us too, to allow ourselves to grieve and to remind ourselves that death is not an end but a beginning of a new life with God.

Prayer for the souls in purification,

Eternal rest grant unto them ,O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon. May their souls rest in peace. Amen