

## AN INCONCEIVABLE GOD

*How great is your name, O Lord our God,  
Through all the earth. (Psalm 8)*

In recent weeks I have heard different people make various remarks such as, I am a humanist; I am an atheist; I do not believe in God; I am not religious. I know it is not easy to believe in God. He is inconceivable. Beyond human comprehension. Fortunately, I was brought up to believe and have continued to do so all my life but there was a time when I thought I was losing my faith. I read the words of the psalm,

*When I see the heavens, the work of your hands,  
The moon and the stars which you arranged,*

and I began to think of the vastness of the Universe and I could not imagine the immensity of it. I began to wonder how there could be a being so great as to be able to create such a thing. I confessed my thoughts to a priest and I was advised that I was not losing my faith but beginning to appreciate the greatness of God. The universe does indeed seem to be infinite for man has developed telescopes that can see further and further and have found stars that we did not know existed. Then how did the universe begin, it could not create itself? There must be a creator, yet Earth is but a tiny speck of dust in this vast universe. The psalm continues,

*What is man that you should keep him in mind,  
Mortal man that you care for him?*

*Yet you have made him little less than a god;  
With glory and honour you crowned him,  
Gave him power over the work of your hand,  
put all things under his feet*

I realised that it is nothing to do with size for God is the creator and loves all that he has created even the things that are so much smaller than we are, so small that we cannot see them with the naked eye. However, he gave mankind special gifts. He gave us all we needed to live, no more, no less. He gave us intelligence and the ability to study and learn about his creation but he gave us one other important gift, the right to choose. To choose to live as he wants us to live or go our own way. Alas, man chose to go his own way and our world became corrupted. Sin entered our world through pride and greed. When we see what is happening in our world today, we can see how corrupted our world has become. But we can choose not to be part of that corruption. To know and love God we need humility. We need to recognise our place in God's creation and to know our place in this society. Humility is not submitting to all the corruption around us but standing firm against it. Not taking from but giving to those around us. Not hating but loving our neighbours. I wish that world leaders would realise that war cannot solve problems.

Pope Francis has declared 2025 as a Jubilee year and urges us to turn to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus and implore his help. In my parent's house, there was a statue of the Sacred Heart in a prominent position for all to see. My mother taught us short prayers to say. Each day, as I come in from the car park through the porch door, there in front of me is the parish's lovely statue and I look up at it and pray those same prayers,

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I implore,  
Make me love you more and more.

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart,  
Make my heart like unto thine.

### INCONCEIVEABLE LOVE

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

As I sat before the Blessed Sacrament during the time of Morning Prayer, my thoughts turned back to my previous reflection about the greatness of the creative God and my eyes were drawn up to the wonderful crucifix hanging above the altar and I realised how great was the love that God has for us, so great it too is inconceivable. I have recently been reading about Saint Francis of Assisi and how when he looked at the dying Jesus nailed to the cross, he wept. Jesus is divine, the Son of God, yet, because of his love for us, he set aside his divinity and became one with us but he did not come in majesty, he came as a vulnerable baby born to a woman in the most humble of circumstances. Soon after his birth the, the family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, were threatened and forced into exile. When they finally were able to return to their homeland, they lived a humble and ordinary life in obscurity. When Jesus finally began his ministry, he was persecuted, tortured and put to a cruel, humiliating and agonising death. Jesus knew what would happen to him but did not shirk away from it. He humbly accepted it. "Father, not my will but thine be done."

*Forbid it Lord, that I should boast.  
Save in the death of Christ, my God  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.*

I cannot compare myself to Saint Francis nor can I claim to have been moved to tears as he was but I was moved to think of my own life and how blessed it has been. But why? I have done very little to deserve it. I realised how little I have appreciated God's infinite love for us and how little gratitude I have shown throughout my life for all the graces and blessings he has bestowed upon me. I realised how ignorant I have been and how unaware of other people's suffering. I have been a member of this parish for more than five decades. When I was first asked to take the Blessed Sacrament to the sick and housebound, I was overwhelmed with joy but now, with age, I wonder if perhaps all I do has become a habit.

*See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e're such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown.*

In this jubilee year of hope, I want to try to follow the example of Saint Francis. If I can accept my partial loss of sight and hearing and treat them as blessings rather than disabilities and if I can accept all the aches and pains that come with age and the things I was once able to do and can now no longer do with humility and offer them in thanksgiving for all God's gifts; if I can gladly accept all the little things that usually annoy me as opportunities to give thanks to him for his infinite love and if, when people are unkind to me, I can accept it without response or comment then perhaps I will begin to experience that 'perfect joy' that Saint Francis spoke about. Perhaps when I look up at the dying Christ I, too, will be moved to tears.

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small,  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life my, all.*

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.

## JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE-LENT

*"I am just a poor nun who prays!"*

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

We are now into Lent and trying hard to fast and do penance. I am trying to avoid eating sweet treats such as cakes and biscuits and to reduce the portions on my plate which is hard when you have a wife with a generous heart and who is a qualified chef and loves to treat people. But we are both trying hard to observe our Lenten fast. There is only one food I will never refuse. The food of life, The Holy Eucharist, The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our saviour.

I was reminded the other day of a man who, in the latter half of the last century, was a popular TV personality. Malcolm Muggeridge was a hard-nosed journalist, a critic and a satirist. He was not a believer and did not adhere to any religion but he was an intellectual and a very witty man and I quite liked him. Mother Teresa and her sisters were becoming well known at that time and Malcom took a film crew to Calcutta to make a documentary about them. They filmed the work these nuns were doing in the streets caring for every poor sick and dying unfortunate they found. Malcolm was astonished and asked how were they able to do what they were doing and still keep smiling. Mother Teresa invited him to come the convent early the next morning, she showed him through to the chapel where he sat and watched them celebrate Mass and receive the Blessed Sacrament. He found it very humble and holy but a bit boring. Afterwards, Mother Teresa said to him, "Did you see? The whole secret is here. It is Jesus who puts his love in our hearts and we simply go out and give it to the poor we meet". Malcolm Muggeridge was so impressed he later was baptised a Catholic. While reading about Saint Teresa, I began to think of my own life.

Every morning, I say a prayer by Saint John Henry Newman asking Jesus to stay with me. Part of the prayer is "teach me to preach without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, by my visible resemblance to your saints and the evident fullness of the love which my heart bears for you." In the gospel on Ash Wednesday, Jesus tells us to pray in secret and to not draw attention to oneself. At first, I thought the prayer and the Gospel reading were contradictory but when I reflected on it, I realised that when we pray, it is what is in our hearts that is important. I try to say my prayers slowly and with meaning especially at Mass, When I say the responses, I try, consciously to mean every word.

As I reflected, I became aware of how little I am. I have lived to a good age and my life has been very blessed. I grew up with five sisters and two brothers, I was the middle one of eight and while reflecting I came to realise that I am the least of my siblings for they all have attained more qualifications and have achieved more than I have. Even my own children and grandchildren have out shone me. I closed my eyes and thought of all the people I have known, both past and present, who have served this parish so well. What great faith they had. I felt humbled. I have been very naïve throughout my life. I have known that there were bad people in the world who did bad things but as far as I know I have never met anyone like that. I have met many people throughout my life, some have disappointed me but never to an extent to cause me to hold a grudge and I pray for their welfare. God has always been there to watch over me. I fear that I may be judged more harshly, not for what I have done but for what I should have done but failed to do.

*O Lord, have mercy on me a sinner!*

## THE BAD THIEF?

*Christ be in all hearts thinking about me,  
Christ be in all tongues telling of me.*

Recently, our Lenten reflection group talked about forgiveness and we meditated on the crucifixion of Jesus and the two criminals who hung on crosses one on either side of him. One seemed to be bitter and resentful; the other was penitent. It was noted that Luke was the only evangelist who had recorded this interaction between Jesus and the two men who had been crucified with him. We noted also that one of them is considered to be the first saint as Jesus promised him "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." We usually refer to the criminals as the bad thief and the good thief but I am not sure we should think that way.

There are good people who find it very hard to forgive those who have in some way hurt them. They may have been hurt and let down many times which has made them afraid, wary and unable to trust. It has caused them to be bitter and suspicious of others. They have become defensive which makes it hard for them to trust those who try to help. And there are those who have had a good life, surrounded by people who have loved them and supported them always, making them more able to make allowances for those who have wronged them. They have not become bitter and are more able to forgive. The good thief may have been like that but, like the prodigal son desired more in his life. Perhaps his desire led him to a life of crime but in the last moments of his life he has realised his mistakes and recognised his guilt. He is truly sorry for his crimes and asks for forgiveness. Jesus will never reject the repentant sinner.

On the other hand, who knows what hardship the "bad" thief has experienced throughout his life. Perhaps he has been rejected and cruelly abused from his childhood. Perhaps he has grown up with little knowledge of God and has turned to crime as the only way he can support himself. Who knows if in those last moments of his life he has not had a realisation that God is and his seeming rejection of Jesus is not actually a desperate cry for mercy, begging Jesus to save him. Only God can know what was in his heart.

We cannot judge or condemn others, even when we feel hurt and offended. We must always try to see things from the other's point of view. Perhaps we have inadvertently offended the other person and caused him to lash out at us. Although we may not forget, we must always be prepared to forgive. In the prayer that Jesus taught us we say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we cannot forgive, we are holding in our hearts the pain and resentment that we felt when someone, perhaps inadvertently, may have said or done something to hurt us while that person may not even be aware of how we feel. Forgiving is self-healing and not forgiving is self-harming. I pray that I will always be able to forgive and pray for those who have hurt me.

*Christ be the vision in eyes that see me,  
In ears that hear me, Christ ever be.*

## LEAD KINDLY LIGHT

*Amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on.*

People may say that I am a cradle catholic and I suppose I am but that does not mean that I have not questioned my beliefs. I have asked myself what is so special about the Catholic faith. I have known many good Christian people who are non-Catholics. It has been pointed out to me many times that being a Catholic does not make me a better person than someone who is faithful to another denomination. They point out that we all worship the same God and try hard to follow the same teaching that Jesus, our redeemer, taught us. We do not need to go to church every day or every week or even once a year to do that. We can say prayers and do good works at any time and at any place we please. Perhaps that is so for some but not for me. I recognise my own weakness and frailty and I know that I need the grace that the sacraments give me to help me to be a better person than I am.

One of my favourite saints is John Henry Newman. He was an English Theologist, Academic, Philosopher, Historian, Writer and Poet. He was brought up in the Anglican tradition and was educated at Oxford University. He became a priest in the Anglican church and lectured at Oxford University. Later, he resigned his position and two years after that he converted to Catholicism. He was made a Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII. He was canonised a saint in 2019 by pope Francis. One of his best-known hymns is "Lead kindly light". He became a Catholic because he believed that the Catholic church had the most direct line back to Jesus. He also believed in the "real presence of Jesus" in Holy Communion. I have many beautiful prayers written by him and use some of them regularly.

When I took my first communion, I can remember clearly the wonder and awe I felt. I still truly believe in the real presence, in transubstantiation. During the mass, the priest, as he prepares the bread and wine, prays silently, "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity". The consecration of the bread and wine is not just a symbolic re-enactment of what Jesus did at the last supper. I believe, when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, a miracle occurs and they become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. There is no visible change but there is a change in substance. I know this is not easy to understand, especially for those who have grown up with little knowledge of God. I pray that I will always feel that wonder and awe. That is why I try to begin each day by attending mass and receiving the Blessed Sacrament. It sets me up to face the day ahead. I try to truly participate in the mass and make every prayer meaningful. When I go forward to receive the Blessed Sacrament, I pray that my approach will be with complete humility, gratitude, reverence and devotion. There is a prayer I say every day,

*O Jesus, stay with me and then I will begin to shine as you shine,  
so to shine as to be a light to others.*

*The light, O Jesus, will be all from you; none of it will be mine.  
It will be you, shining on others through me.*

*Let me thus praise you in the way which you love best,  
by shining on those around me.*

*Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by example,  
by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do,  
the evident fullness of the love my heart bears for you. Amen. (St. John Henry Newman)*

*Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene: one step enough for me*

## CROSSING THE BAR

*I've crossed the bar at last, mates.  
My longest voyage is done*

Over the last few months, I have had to bid my last farewell to a number of family members and dear friends including members of this parish family. It has saddened me to say goodbye but I have been consoled knowing that they were all good people, people I loved, respected and admired. In just the last five years, I have lost two brothers, a sister, four cousins, three dear friends to whom I have been close to for half a century as well as a number of dear members of this parish, all of whom I feel privileged to have known. One of those life-long friends served many years in the Merchant Navy and never lost his love of the sea. The above quotation is from a poem which was read at his remembrance service. The poem is called "The old sailor" by Margaret E. Sangster, and I was very moved by it. I have reread it over and over many times and it has caused me to reflect on my own life.

I think that my whole life has been one long voyage in numerous stages and the vessel I have served on is the Holy Church; my captain, Jesus Christ. I have tried to be a good and loyal crew member but I know that many times I have been a disappointment to my captain but He has never disowned me nor cast me aside, His patience and understanding is ineffable. I remember little of my early childhood but my mother obviously played a major part in it for I remember much of the things she taught me. When the war ended and the family returned from evacuation in Ireland, I was only six. I became very close to Dad in those following few years. We lived in Rock Ferry and I attended school at St Anne's primary school. I remember some of my primary school days. My first teacher was Sister Marie de Lourdes. She was lovely. She taught me to read and prepared me for my first Holy Communion. I became an altar boy and learned all the Latin responses, although I did not understand what they meant. At that time, I thought I wanted to be a priest when I grew up. I only really got to know my dad during those few precious years after the war. I lost him when he was killed in a fatal road accident. I was only thirteen. I was devastated and it affected the rest of my teenage years but one thing kept me going, I had a parent in heaven who would look after me.

The next stage in my voyage was when we married and had children. I took my commitment to my wife and children very seriously. I worked hard to provide for them, both physically and spiritually. The children were still small when we came to live in Neston and all attended St. Winefride's primary school. We were very happy although there were some difficult times when we did not know where to turn but I always remembered what my mother taught us, that God would always provide and He did. In order to give a little back to the community, I joined the Knights of St. Columba for a while and became involved in Parish activities. I began to take on several ministries such as Catechist helping parents of first communicants, minister of the word, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and Sacristan. I truly believe that I received far, far more from these ministries and the people I served than I could ever have given. I am now unable to safely carry out and do justice to these ministries and have sadly resigned, I have crossed the bar. but I can still sing God's praises and pray for those I know and love as well as those I do not know personally but know they are in need; the poor, the sick, the hungry, the homeless and the vulnerable.

I have respectfully composed my own ending to Margaret Stangster's poem.

My body's old and weary,  
My senses failing fast,  
But I'll not complain, mates,  
For soon I'll see the face of God at last.  
It may not be this year,  
Perhaps, not even next,  
For time it does not matter,  
For I will ever trust  
That, He, My God, will safely guide me  
to my final place of rest.

## HOPE

*The most beautiful of all creation is that which is made in God's image, that is, each one of us.*

*Pope Leo X1v*

Many years ago, I read a book about Saint John of the Cross. I was inspired by it. Saint John was a good friend and colleague of Saint Teresa of Avila, a writer and a poet. Perhaps, his best-known work was "The dark night of the soul". At that time, I was having some difficulty with my own faith. I was not doubting God but myself. The overwhelming feelings of love and joy that I had experienced when I first became an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion seemed to have left me and I wondered if I was losing my faith. I did not think it was as serious as a dark night of the soul, but it troubled me. I spoke about it to my priest and he gave me some reassurance. During this Year of Hope, I have been re-examining my faith again and asking myself, what am I hoping for? Because of my age and my physical condition, I can no longer safely commit to the ministries I so loved being involved in.

These last few months have been difficult. So many bereavements of family and friends have made me realise how few years I may have left in this life. I am not afraid of dying, I am more concerned for those I leave bereaved. I think about our broken world and our young ones and how will they cope with what we leave them. Again, I know it is not a dark night of the soul for I know that I am not as saintly as Saint John. He was a very holy person. I pray each day for holiness but I realise how small and insignificant I am. I acknowledge every day how much Jesus has given to me and done for me and how little I have to give back to him; I am so weak, so timid and sinful, but I pray for the courage and the strength to overcome my failings. It was then that I read the above quote by Pope Leo and I realised that it does not matter how small and insignificant I am, I am a part of God's creation. One of my favourite saints is Saint John Henry Newman. He writes-

*God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in this great work. He has not created me for naught. I shall do his work.*

God made me for a special reason, for a mission that only I can fulfil. I do not know what that mission is and perhaps will not ever know in this life but I can hope and pray that when I am called to the next life I will have fulfilled that mission.

This is a Jubilee year of Hope. I recently began a 28-day pilgrimage of hope with the help from a CTS book I received in the post called "Dare to Hope" by Father James McTavish FMVD. It is a series of daily reflections. From them, I have learned how negative and offensive to Faith, Hope and Love are these feelings of sadness, anxiety and discouragement. They lead only to despair and hopelessness. I have also an anchor in Heaven, but He is not only in Heaven, He is with me at all times. He is there in the tabernacle when I go to church for Morning Prayer and when I receive Him in Holy Communion, He remains with me throughout the day. I have only to turn to him and ask his help.

*This is our Christian hope; The light of Jesus, the salvation that Jesus brings to us with his light that saves us from the darkness.* Pope Francis

## CONTENTMENT

*Religion, of course, does bring large profits, but only to those who are content with what they have. (First letter of Saint Paul to Timothy 6:2-12)*

My parents were not wealthy, they were ordinary working-class people, yet the legacy they passed on to me and my siblings made us rich, not in a material way but spiritually. They passed on the faith which they held firm. They taught us about a loving and generous God who would always watch over us and He has. My life has been very blessed. I do not claim to deserve it nor do I feel I have earned it. When I am judged, I think it will not be just on what I have done but also on that which I have failed to do.

There was a dear parishioner who died some time ago but I remember what he used to tell us, that he was blessed with a lack of ambition. Yet, he was very highly esteemed in his profession. I thought that was strange at first but, then, reflecting on it, I realised how deep that was. In my career, my earnings were made up of a basic salary plus commission. I came to understand that if my motivation was how much commission I could earn, then I would be putting my own interests before the needs of my customers and not serving them as I should, but if I put their interests before my own, then God would make sure that the rewards would follow automatically. I tried ever since then to follow that rule and to listen carefully in order to understand my customer's needs.

*Saint Paul says, "People who long to be rich are prey to temptation; they get trapped into all sorts of foolish and dangerous ambitions which eventually plunge them into ruin and destruction."*

I do not think I have ever sought fame or fortune, nor have I longed to win the lottery or to own a bigger house or a bigger and better car for my life has been very blessed. I have a wife who has loved and cherished me for 65 years; in the house in which we have lived in for 57 years, we have made a home that has been full of love and laughter. We have two sons, a daughter, seven grandchildren and twelve great-grandchildren in whom we are very proud. We have always welcomed those who call and those who visit, rarely go home empty-handed. My wife is a very good cook and very generous. I am not saying that life has been easy, there have been hard times, many difficulties that were hard to overcome and some sad times but we have always faced them together, supporting one another and God has always helped us find a way through. How can any of us compare our tribulations with the sacrifices that Jesus, the Son of God, suffered for us. He became one of us and lived with us. He suffered and died for us. I am content with what I have and grateful to God for all his gifts. My constant prayer is;

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, timid and sinful. Strengthen and encourage me that I may dedicate my life to you.

## THE ROOD

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count as loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

It was a cold, dull morning and very overcast as I arrived at church. Inside it was quite dark as the lights had not yet been turned on. Father Tom was sitting at the side of the altar praying. I was the first to arrive for morning mass. I knelt in my usual place, looked at the tabernacle and thanked Jesus for being there for me and also for calling me to receive him at this mass. I then sat back on my seat, closed my eyes and listened. All was calm and quiet. In our beautiful church, hanging above the altar, there is a magnificent rood, a large cross with the figure of Christ nailed to it. At the base of the cross, one on either side, stand two figures, Mary and John the apostle. When I looked up at it, in the dim light of the church, it seemed like a dark shadow.

When the lights in the church were switched on, I looked back up at the Rood and began to observe Jesus' wounds; the crown of thorns, the nailed hands and feet and the wound in his side made by the lance which told the soldier there was no need to further disfigure the body for it was dead. As I looked at the crown, I thought of the mental anguish that Jesus endured prior to his arrest. So great that He, the Son of God, cried out to his father to take this cup away but then completely submitted to the Father's will. I tried to imagine the pain of each sharp cruel thorn piercing his scalp. I thought of those hands nailed to the wood; hands that had healed the sick, given sight to the blind and raised the dead back to life; those feet that had walked so many miles to give the message of salvation; and I thought of the wounds that are never displayed; the scars left on his back from the torturous scourging at the pillar. I imagined the bruises and cuts to his face and body brought about by the abuse, the blows and rough-handling of his captors; the damage to his shoulders from the heavy cross he carried; the damage to his knees when he fell three times under the weight of it. I wondered which hurt him most, the crucifixion or the sins of mankind which made it necessary for our salvation. I felt very emotional and for the first time while looking at a crucifix, my eyes filled with tears.

*See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.*

I looked then at Mary, his mother and could not even begin to imagine her anguish. Here was the son she gave birth to in a lowly cattle shed; the baby she cradled in her arms as she sang a lullaby. This was the boy that was missing for three days and brought so much anxiety to Mary and Joseph not knowing where he was; the teenager who showed so much care and consideration for everyone he met. This was the young man who comforted and consoled her when her husband died; the man who had, at her request, changed water into wine when she interceded for the steward at Cana. I think she would have remembered the prophesy of Simion that a sword would pierce her heart. I am sure, to her, it felt more like a thousand swords!

*Were all the realms of nature mine,  
That were an offer far too small.  
Love so amazing so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

The Rood is quite ornate and it seemed a contradiction to so dreadful an event it was commemorating, but then I realised that the crucifixion led to the resurrection, the greatest event of all time.

O Jesus, my Lord and my God, have mercy on me a sinner!  
Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for me.

## THE CREED

I believe in God. That is so easy to say. We say it every week when we celebrate Mass on Sunday. It is the beginning of the Creed. Like so many prayers, we say them so often, we are inclined to say them without thinking what the words we are saying really mean. In recent years, I have tried to make a special effort to concentrate on what is happening when we celebrate mass and to say each prayer devoutly and with meaning; to listen intently to the readings and the homily. Before coming to mass, I prepare by looking at the first readings, the psalm and the gospel, trying to understand their meaning. This helps me to avoid distraction during Mass.

I believe in God, so easy to say but so hard to contemplate and impossible to understand or at least it is for me. I am not a learned man nor even very clever. I have been abroad a few times but I have seen only tiny parts of this world apart from what I have seen on television or in books. I find it amazing when I think of this Solar system but exploring further into the universe and infinity is difficult to imagine. Infinity is beyond my comprehension, but God is an almighty, eternal and infinitive being, without a beginning and without end who created all that is. To deny the existence of God is to deny the whole universe and all that is in it for there is nothing in the universe that can come into being unless it has been created were, before, there was nothing. I cannot prove that God exists but my heart tells me that He is there for me and every day I recognise signs that he is watching over me. I believe that from when the first man was created, God has been revealing himself to us through the prophets. His son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, humbled himself to share in our humanity so that we could share in his divinity. Jesus became one with us when he was born to the virgin Mary. During his life here on earth, he revealed his father to us and showed us the way to his kingdom. By his death and resurrection, he promised us admittance to that kingdom if we follow his way. After his ascension, Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to guide us on that way. I believe that He is still revealing himself to us, speaking to us but his voice is often so gentle we have to listen hard. The readings in the last couple of weeks of ordinary time, from the book of Danial have been quite disturbing. It made me think how very troubled our world is at this point in time and even in the gospels, Jesus was warning us to be ready for we did not know the day nor the hour that the second coming would be. We are now into Advent and the readings are more uplifting and so full of promise, encouraging us to wait patiently and prepare for the joyful coming of Jesus, our saviour.

When I was younger and still working, I thought that if my wife was taken from me and I was left bereaved, I would give away all my earthly possessions and join a monastery for I firmly believed that my earthly vocation was to be a loving and faithful husband and father and to try to pass on to them my faith in God and in Jesus Christ, the son of God. After 64 years of marriage and Fatherhood, I am not sure how successfully I have carried out that mission or how poorly I may have failed but I am still trying. I am not an eloquent person nor am I charismatic. I cannot draw people to me and preach the word of God to them. I can only try to follow the words of St. John Henry Newman in his beautiful prayer which I recite every day asking Jesus to teach me "to preach without preaching - not by words but by my example and by the sympathetic influence of what I do - by my visible resemblance to his saints and the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to him".

O almighty and merciful God, Loving Father in Heaven, thank you for all your gifts, for all the graces and blessings you have bestowed upon us. I am sorry for the times I have offended your infinite goodness and I am resolve, with the help of your grace, nevermore to offend you again.