

DEANERY OF ST EDMUND CAMPION
ENGLISH MARTYRS—
VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE PASTORAL AREA

www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

www.hendredcatholicparish.org.uk

East Hendred Catholic Parish



Botticelli

CHRISTMAS 2021

CHRISTMAS 2021

All masses live-streamed www.churchservices.tv/easthendred

St Mary's is usually open each day from 9am until late afternoon.

CHRISTMAS			[GOLD]
Christmas Eve	4pm	Mass of the Vigil	<i>FM Louisa Goddard 1963</i>
	8pm	Mass of the Night	<i>Pro populo</i>
Christmas Day	9.30am	Mass of the Day	<i>Pro populo</i>
	11.15am	Mass at St Patrick's	

Sunday 26th December	HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH		
	9.30am	Parish Mass	<i>Pro populo</i>

No Mass at 11.15am or 6pm

Monday 27th December	St John, Apostle, Evangelist		[white]
	<u>9.30am</u>	Holy Mass	<i>FM Sybil Clarke 1958</i>

Tuesday 28th December	Holy Innocents		[red]
	<u>9.30am</u>	Holy Mass	<i>FM Henry Lester Louis Morris 1963</i>

Wednesday 29th December	St Thomas of Canterbury		[red]
	<u>9.30am</u>	Holy Mass	<i>FM Canon Luck 1919</i>

Thursday 30th December	<i>in the Christmas Octave</i>		[white]
	<i>No Mass</i>		

Friday 31st December	<i>in the Christmas Octave</i>		[white]
	<i>No Mass</i>		

SATURDAY 1ST JANUARY 2022	MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD		[white]
	9.30am	Holy Mass	

Sunday 2nd January	HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH		
	9.30am	Parish Mass	<i>Pro populo</i>
	11.15am	Holy Mass at St Patrick's	

CONTACT DETAILS

Fr Andrew: 01235 835038 or 07976 437979

aburnham@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

hendred@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

Reflection Born of the Virgin Mary (4)

An Extract from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Mary's divine motherhood

495 Called in the Gospels 'the mother of Jesus', Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as 'the mother of my Lord'. In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly 'Mother of God' (*Theotokos*).

Mary's virginity

496 From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived 'by the Holy Spirit without human seed'. The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own. Thus St. Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century says:

You are firmly convinced about our Lord, who is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin, . . . he was truly nailed to a tree for us in his flesh under Pontius Pilate. . . he truly suffered, as he is also truly risen.

497 The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility: 'That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit', said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée. The Church sees here the fulfilment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.'

to be continued.....

Message from the Bishops

The Conference of Catholic Bishops of England and Wales has made a statement stressing the current regulations as laid down by the government. The Bishops ask that masks be worn even for singing, except by soloists &c. The statement also includes the following:

Clarification on the Sunday Obligation

The Bishops' Statement *Honouring Sunday* reflected the pastoral situation of public worship in the light of the pandemic situation at this time. The Bishops have asked for all Catholics to reflect on their personal circumstances with respect to their attendance at public worship. Questions have been raised regarding the status of the Sunday Obligation. The *Code of Canon Law* states that 'Sunday... is the primordial holy day of obligation' (Can. 1246§1) and 'the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass.' (Can. 1247)

At the beginning of the pandemic, from Friday 20th March 2020, the Bishops of England and Wales recognised that the participation of the faithful in the Sunday Eucharistic Celebration was prevented due to grave cause because of the inception of the covid-19 pandemic and stated that the Sunday obligation could not be fulfilled due to the inherent danger of the faithful gathering in churches for the Eucharistic celebration. On Monday 23rd March 2020, HM Government mandated the closure of places of worship along with other locations.

The Bishops, now having reflected on the current situation in England and Wales, recognise that the causes and effects of the pandemic are still present to such a degree that the absolute duty for all to freely attend the Sunday Eucharistic Celebration cannot yet be fulfilled.

As such, they have asked that all Catholics now reflect on the centrality of the Eucharist to their own life of faith and take into consideration their personal circumstances and the reasons as to whether they can now attend the Sunday Eucharistic Celebration or otherwise. Should a person feel that grave cause honestly persists in their personal circumstances, there is no sin associated with their non-attendance at Mass, and they are encouraged to devote themselves to prayer at home. This may be achieved either through personal prayer or by participating with a live-streamed celebration of Mass from a Church.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



HOLY FATHER'S DECEMBER PRAYER INTENTION

Let us pray that every country decides to take necessary measures to make the future of children a priority, especially the future of children who are suffering today.

THE SICK AND THOSE IN NEED

Baby Martha, Sid Wallace, Dame Catherine, Diana France, John Castle, Petal Connell, Daniel Cuevas, John Stringer, Louise Woodhouse, Mary Wallace, Brenda Paddon, Karen Greig, Mary McNichol, Elizabeth Gunn, Des McNichol

THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

Recently departed: Kitty Teasdale

Week 26th December - 1st January: Kathleen Cavan, Sybil Clerk, May Mulford, Mary Throckmorton, Beatrice Scrope, Patrick Rush, Joseph Leahy, Peggy Bray, Cyril Charlton, Mary Wallington.

East Hendred Catholic Parish

NOTICEBOARD

CHRISTMAS COLLECTIONS

Your offerings at Christmas and Easter form a not inconsiderable part of the Annual Income of the Parish Priest. Those who do not have a Standing Order are invited to use one of the yellow envelopes marked 'Christmas Gift'. A Gift Aid number on the envelope can also be applied. Many thanks for your generosity and kindness.

CHRISTMAS MASSES

Christmas masses are now fully booked. We cannot guarantee that there will be any 'walk up' places available. If you would still like to try to book for mass, please e-mail hendred@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

MASS SHEETS

Published here is the Mass sheet for 26th December. The Sheets for 24th and 25th December will be handed out at the door. There are mass cards for those who need an *Aide memoire* for the congregational texts.

SUNDAY 26TH DECEMBER

There is just one Mass – 9.30am at St Mary's – and booking is not necessary. However people are asked to notify us if they test positive after being at mass. It is requested that, before coming to Sunday Mass, people take a Lateral Flow Test. The wearing of masks, if you are able to do so, is a legal requirement once more.

CHURCH SERVICES LIVESTREAM

On Sunday 19th December 116 from 59 machines were watching long enough to hear Mass, 48 from the UK, 11 from elsewhere in the world.

SYCAMORE

The **SYCAMORE** course for adults interested in finding out more about the Faith or preparing for baptism and/or confirmation is now well underway. Please contact aburnham@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk if you are interested, a.s.a.p. **SYCAMORE** meets on Tuesday at 8pm on Zoom. We are now halfway through and will resume on 11th January. It is not too late to join but those who join at this point will need extra sessions.

CHILDREN'S LITURGY

Nativity figures for children are at the back of St Mary's. They are suitable for 4-7 years old. Thanks to Libby Holderness for this.

CATHOLIC NETWORK

What was formerly 'the Universe', the most popular Catholic Newspaper, is no more. Instead there is a free on-line Catholic publication.

<http://www.thecatholicnetwork.co.uk/>

ST AMAND'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

St Amand's Catholic Primary School, East Hendred - where 'pupils enter with excitement and leave smiling...staff, parents and pupils are part of a loving family' OFSTED Report, September 2019

St Amand's has places available for children in various year groups and if your child will be starting Reception in September 2022 please visit our friendly school to see how much a Catholic education has to offer. To find out more, contact the Headteacher Mrs Ellery on [01235 833342](tel:01235833342)

Our website: www.st-amands.oxon.sch.uk

or email office.3855@st-amands.oxon.sch.uk

Follow us on Twitter @StAmandPrimary or

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/St-Amands-Catholic-Primary-School-10489078796526>

SYNOD 2021-2023

Last October, the Holy Father launched a three-year consultation process with the whole Church. There are three stages. Between now and the end of April 2022, parishes are to produce a report to send to the diocese. These will be conflated nationally and, from September 2022 to March 2023, there will be reflections throughout the world. Finally in October 2023, the Synod of Bishops will meet in Rome to produce a report for the Pope. Every parish is asking people and groups to reflect on 'What changes need to be made – in myself, in our parish, in the Diocese, to make the Church's mission today more vibrant and effective?' We shall co-ordinate our parish response via individuals and accredited groups through the Parish Pastoral Council and the St Patrick's Pastoral Committee. Meanwhile, comments and suggestions, personal and group submissions, to Fr Andrew or to John Carpenter.

E-MAILS, WEBSITE, AND FACEBOOK

Last minute changes are sometimes unavoidable and these are communicated by e-mail to the Bulletin list. Anyone may join the Bulletin list - contact hendred@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk – and particular care should be taken of those who have no access to e-mail.

See our website www.hendredcatholicparish.org.uk

See also our East Hendred Catholic Parish page on Facebook.

GIVING

CHARITY: CRISIS AT CHRISTMAS

Give A Christmas To Remember | Donate To Crisis At Christmas

Ad-<https://www.crisis.org.uk/>

Crisis at Christmas can be a real turning point for someone who's homeless. Donate today. Your gift of £29.06 could give someone hot meals, a place to stay and year-round support. UK's Charity for Homeless. We Will End Homelessness. Donate & transform lives.

CHARITY: DIDCOT

To help with supplying the Didcot Foodbank, contact Veronica Paget: veronicapaget@hotmail.com or leave suitable food outside her front door.

GIVING TO THE PARISH

BY REGULAR STANDING ORDER OR GIFT

BANK DETAILS: PRCDTR East Hendred, St Mary

Sort Code: 309304 Account Number: 00877183

To arrange Gift Aid, contact : hendred@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

Please let us know (if you are a UK Taxpayer) if you are happy for us to claim Gift Aid. At the start of the tax year we need anybody in Gift Aid to let us know if they are no longer taxpayers. In that case we should not make a claim.

Donations to the parish: www.hendredcatholicparish.org.uk

All masses live-streamed www.churchservices.tv/easthendred

Parish Priest:

aburnham@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

Parish Office:

hendred@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

CARMELITE PRIORY, BOARS HILL

CHRISTMAS RAFFLE

<https://www.carmelite.uk.net/product/christmas-raffle/>

HOW TO PURCHASE A RAFFLE TICKET

If you would like to participate in our Christmas Raffle event, we would be very grateful for your support! You can do so by selecting the amount you would like to purchase, clicking **add to basket**, then **view basket** and following the on-screen instructions. To purchase a **discounted set of 5 tickets** – you can [do so here](#).

Description

Thank you for supporting us and purchasing a raffle ticket.

Each ticket is £5. The proceeds will be used to help towards the maintenance and renovation of the Priory.

Prizes include....

1. Free Residential Weekend retreat at the Carmelite Priory, Boars Hill, Oxford (as available)
2. Free 4-day Online Individually Guided Retreat
3. *The Simplicity of Love* by Jennifer Moorcroft (Teresian Press, 2021)
4. *The Triple Way to Transformation* by Susan Muto (Teresian Press, 2021)
5. Carmelite Ordo for 2022 / Companion to the Carmelite Ordo
6. A year's subscription to Mount Carmel Magazine
7. Free ticket for one person to attend the 2022 Spirituality Conference Online
8. Free ticket for one person to attend the 2022 Spirituality Conference live AND stay at the Retreat Centre
9. Free one-person membership to the Wisdom Lectures for one year
10. A voucher worth £50 to use for an item of your choice between now and December 2022

The live online draw will take place on Monday 3rd January starting with a prayerful gathering at 7:30 pm (UK time)

The draw will close at 5 pm (UK time).

East Hendred Catholic Parish



Holy Family (C)

(Sunday after Christmas)
26th December 2021

Antiphons, Prayers and Readings

Entrance Antiphon

The shepherds went in haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in a manger.

Venerunt pastores

Luke 2:16

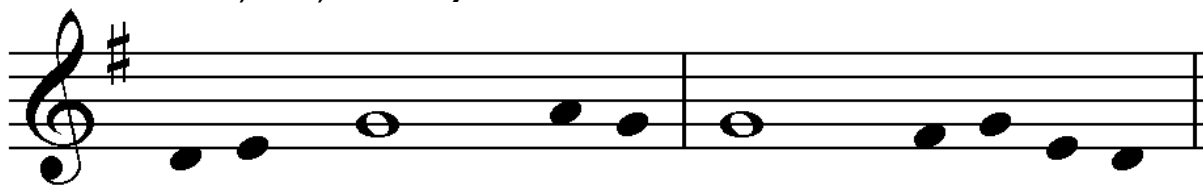
Collect

O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practising the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever

First Reading

1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28 (RSV)

Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the Lord.' And the man Elka'nah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and abide there for ever.' And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine; and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slew the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me my petition which I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord.' And they worshipped the Lord there.



R/ *Bles-sed* **are they** *who dwell* | **in** *your house, O Lord.*

*How love-ly is your dwel-ling place,
() O Lord of hosts.*

*My soul is longing and yearn-ing,
for the courts of the Lord.*

*My heart and my flesh cry out ()
to the li-ving God. **R/***

*Blessed are they who dwell in your house (),
for ever sing-ing your praise.*

*Blessed the people whose strength is in you (),
Whose heart is set on pil-grim ways. **R/***

*O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Ja-cob.*

*Turn your eyes, O God, our shield,
look on the face of your a-noin-ted. **R/***

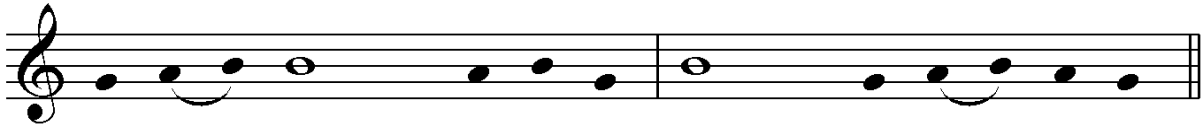
Second Reading

1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 (RSV)

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

Alleluia





O- pen our heart, O Lord, | to accept the words of your Son.

Gospel

Luke 2:41-52 (RSV)

Now the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.' And he said to them, 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.

Prayer over the Offerings

We offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation, humbly asking that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and Saint Joseph, you may establish our families firmly in your grace and your peace. Through Christ our Lord.

Preface

(De Nativitate Domini III)

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendour: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honour but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal. And so, in company with the choirs of Angels, we praise you, and with joy we proclaim: Holy, holy, holy &c.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION *after St Alphonsus Liguori (18th cent.)*

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things and I desire to receive you into my soul. Even if I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there, and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus. There is room in my heart for you.

Communion Antiphon *Deus noster*
Our God has appeared on the earth and lived among us. *Baruch 3:38*

Prayer after Communion
Bring those you refresh with this heavenly Sacrament, most merciful Father, to imitate constantly the example of the Holy Family, so that, after the trials of this world, we may share their company for ever. Through Christ our Lord.

Scripture Reading

27 th December	1 John 1:1-4	John 20:2-8
28 th December	1 John 1:5 – 2:2	Matthew 2:13-18
29 th December	1 John 2:3-11	Luke 2:22-35
30 th December	1 John 2:12-17	Luke 2:36-40
31 st December	1 John 2:18-21	John 1:1-18

MARY, HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

1st January	Numbers 6:22-27	
	Galatians 4:4-7	Luke 2:16-21

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

2nd January	Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2, 8-12	
	Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18	John 1:1-18
3 rd January	1 John 2:[22-28],29 – 3:6	John 1:[19-25],29-34
4 th January	1 John 3:7-10	John 1:35-42
5 th January	1 John 3:11-21	John 1:43-51

EPIPHANY

Isaiah 60:1-6	
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6	Matthew 2:1-12

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The Divine Office

The People of God share in different ways in the daily recitation of the Divine Office. The Office of Readings (sometimes called 'Vigils' or 'Matins') used to be a night time provision. Nowadays it takes place early in the morning but may be scheduled for any convenient time of day. To this, religious add the minor hours of Terce (approx. 9am), Sext (approx. 12 noon), None (approx. 3pm), and Compline (late evening). Those not in religious communities are able to replace Terce, Sext, and None with a short Midday Office. The major hours are Lauds (Morning Prayer) and Vespers (Evening Prayer), each climaxing with a Gospel Canticle, the Song of Zechariah ('*Benedictus*') in the morning and the Song of Our Lady ('*Magnificat*') in the evening. It is these major hours, which the Second Vatican Council called 'the hinges' ('*cardines*') of the Divine Office and it is these major hours which the whole People of God are to share.

It is not an easy time to buy Office Books, which are all being revised. Stocks are low if not non-existent. Many people now make use of an app and read the Office on an iPad or iPhone. Google <https://universalis.com> for material and help with dealing it. There are some basic decisions: the version on the internet is free but uses its own translation to avoid problems of copyright; the version as an iPhone or android app costs about £10 (one-off single payment) and that allows one to use the proper texts. There are also options: to use Revised Standard Version (as we do in East Hendred); to listen to the Office read and sung &c.

Universalis as it describes itself

Martin Kochanski who runs the site writes:

"[Universalis] is the biggest present there can be, because it changes lives, and it lasts for ever. A Universalis registration code costs £19.99... It gives the recipient all the Mass readings for every day, forever, and all the Hours of the Liturgy of the Hours for every day, forever. There are also benefits such as the daily 'About Today' pages, with their stories of the saints and their illustrations. The registration code works on whatever devices your friend has – Android and iPhone/iPad/iPod Touch and Mac and Windows – and also for making personal e-books. It is very simple indeed to give a Universalis registration code as a present. [Our blog post gives all the details.](#)"

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

27th December 2021 – 1st January 2022

Christmastide

St John

Monday 27th December

Collect

O God, who through the blessed Apostle John have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word: grant, we pray, that we may grasp with proper understanding what he has so marvellously brought to our ears. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Reading

1 John 1:1-4 (RSV)

The Word of Life

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.

Reflection

THE FIRST Letter of John is recognisably from the same pen, or community, as the Gospel of John. The vocabulary – the Word, Light, Life, Love – is markedly similar and the opening chapter, from which the reading is taken, is a mini-version of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.

As in the Gospel there is something of a struggle going on. In the Gospel it was a struggle with the synagogue and those who are referred to as 'the Jews' – not the Jewish race but a particular group of religious leaders. That struggle might have reflected different views of Jesus, what he taught and how to interpret that teaching. The struggle in the First Letter of John is also over how to interpret what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. One group believed that all that matters is that one believes in Jesus as the Word of God. The other group believed that it was important to lead a moral life of integrity, love being the fundamental principle. As Christina Rossetti's poem and carol says:

**Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
Star and angels gave the sign.**

**Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?**

**Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine;
Love to God and others,
Love for plea and gift and sign.**

Holy Innocents

Tuesday 28th December

Collect

O God, whom the Holy Innocents confessed and proclaimed on this day, not by speaking but by dying: grant, we pray, that the faith in you which we confess with our lips may also speak through our manner of life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Reading

1 John 1:5-2:2 (RSV)

God is Light and in him is no darkness at all

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2 My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Reflection

LIGHT and darkness are major themes of St John. In Christ, says the first chapter of John's Gospel 'was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (Jn 1:4-5). We see the conflict between light and darkness during Christmas week in the martyrdom of St Stephen, the slaughter of male children in Bethlehem, and the murder of St Thomas Becket. These atrocities happen against the backdrop of the coming of the Light, a light which shines amidst the darkness of winter and proclaims the victory of life over death. In today's reading, the link between light and darkness, forgiveness and sin, is explained in the advocacy of 'Jesus Christ the righteous [one]', whose sacrificial death brings us forgiveness. He enters the depths of darkness to bring us to the light. Or, to put it another way, the all-mighty, immortal Word becomes a frail, vulnerable infant in order to rescue us from our frailty and vulnerability and empower us with the gift of everlasting life.

St Thomas of Canterbury

Wednesday 29th December

Collect

O God, who gave the Martyr Saint Thomas Becket the courage to give up his life for the sake of justice: grant, through his intercession, that, renouncing our life for the sake of Christ in this world, we may find it in heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Reading

1 John 2:3-11 (RSV)

Love one another

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁴Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. ¹⁰By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.

¹¹For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

Reflection

IN A WORLD divided into Light and Darkness, the world as seen by the First Letter of John, keeping the commandments and thus perfecting the love of God is the fundamental task of the Christian life. Later we shall see that the commandment to love is love for fellow Christians. This message, which we 'heard from the beginning' (v.11), is the message first learnt by the newly-converted. It is the grace of God that we are called – and learn to become – children of God. Sin, says the letter, is lawlessness, and those who commit sin are 'of the devil' (v.8). Though the message of Love is generous and warm, it is, in the end, uncompromising. The alternative to Light is not dimness or murkiness but utter darkness. Those who are 'born of God' do not commit sin' because they share God's nature. This is the struggle of the First Letter of John, between Love and Sin, Light and Darkness, Death and Life.

Thursday 30th December

Reading

1 John 2:12-17 (RSV)

Anyone who does the will of God remains for ever

¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

Reflection

IN THE reading, we have three names for those addressed. 'Children', 'fathers', and 'young men' might be simple poetic repetition or may mean

different groups. 'Children' might be general – all those who belong to the Johannine community, those in the sights of the Gospel of St John. 'Fathers' might be those who are most long-established in their faith. 'Children' might be the newly-converted. All are urged not to love the world, here a transitory place dominated by sin. Lust and the sins of the flesh, as is so often the case, are heavily implicated in love of the world.

New Year's Eve

Thursday 31st December

Reading

1 John 2:18-23

Warning against Antichrists

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. ²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also.

Reflection

THE EVIL One, the Anti-Christ looms large in the battle that faces those who follow Christ and practise the Law of Love. The struggle is already taking place. The strategy of the Devil is to persuade us that Jesus is not the Christ. We come across this quite often with people who think that Jesus might have been a good man, a good rabbi, a healer or worker of miracles, but certainly not the Son of God. But the writer of 1 John is uncompromising: to deny Christ is to deny the Father. We thus see that the battle is not an intellectual battle, a matter of argument, but a battle of Good versus Evil, a battle about what is really true. True believers have both eternal Life and the consolation of the Truth.