

The Carmelite News



CHRIST IN GLORY
(Detail from gold cover of 9th century manuscript)

FEBRUARY 1987
WHITEFRIARS, FAVERSHAM, KENT.



THE ORDINARY SAINT

I don't know about you, but I get great encouragement as I think of St Joseph. The circumstances of his life were so ordinary. He was not born into position or wealth; he married a wife and supported her and her child by the skill of his hands; he was not a learned man, not a preacher or a teacher (and I know some people who are always preaching, don't you!); he accepted responsibility for protecting his family from the threat of people like Herod — and every town has its own Herods — and he guided them to a foreign land to assure their safety; he trained the boy Jesus to be a good son, a good man, a good craftsman like himself. One could go on (one often does a bit, doesn't one!) but one thinks one has made one's point. How does one get off this one — one nonsense?!!

THE MAN NEXT DOOR

The point is that to all outward appearance he could be the man next door, and this is what I find encouraging. Did it ever strike you that the man closest to Jesus and to Mary was the most ordinary of people so far as outward circumstances were concerned?

What is important is not the unusual circumstances of his life but the very ordinariness of so much of it. His circumstances were so much like ours, even down to the misunderstandings and domestic crises and preoccupation with keeping a home together and just surviving, with very little change in the routine of each day, each week, each month, sometimes each year. And change, when it did come, being forced upon him by circumstances rather than being arranged by choice. But in all of it there was love and tenderness; in the monotony there

was patience; in hardship there was endurance; in danger and disaster there was courage and fortitude. There was dislike of paying taxes; there was humour and laughter and friendship as well as loneliness and tears; there was anxiety and the burden of responsibility; there was experience of illness and awareness of death. And to balance it all and bind it all together there was trust in each other and trust in God. Isn't that the life of any one of us?

It's like horses in a way. The Derby winners and the National Hunt champions catch the eye and hit the headlines, but it's the ordinary workhorse that keeps the work of the world going. God's world here on earth is kept going by the ordinary workhorses too. St Joseph is a perennial reminder of that. He's one of us.

A plain man's way to God

Act justly

Love tenderly

and walk humbly with your God

from the Jewish prophet, Micah, 8th century B.C.

WINTER

On the news this morning they said that London had experienced its coldest night for almost fifty years. I felt consoled by this, as I shook the icicles off my shirt, which I had foolishly left by the window!

Isn't it funny how we somehow feel better for the knowledge that we are not the only ones who are suffering, that there are others in the same predicament as ourselves? It is as if suffering of whatever kind is made more bearable by our awareness that others share it, and we are therefore able to identify with them and they

with us. Which leads me to think that the opposite must be true, namely that the feeling of suffering in isolation, the feeling that nobody really knows what I am going through and therefore that nobody cares, makes suffering less bearable and indeed sometimes unendurable.

As I listened to the news this morning (a week or so later) recording the first really cold snap of the winter and swamping us with details — trains abandoned near Maidstone, M2 and M20 impassable, and so on — there was one item that imprinted itself on my mind. Among the mass of detail and statistics occurred the snippet that in the last few days several elderly people had died of cold. They didn't die because they were lost on the Yorkshire Moors or because they had not managed to find their way across the wilderness of Dartmoor. No, they died in their homes from the cold at the first snap of winter. And they died from cold because either they could not pay for sufficient heating or they were afraid they might not be able to pay and so they cut down their gas or electric fires with fatal results.

SOMETHING WRONG

Wasn't it Hamlet who said that there was something rotten in the state of Denmark? Surely there is something seriously wrong with the state of Britain if we accept the deaths of old people from the cold as just another statistic. If it happened only once we might be forgiven for not knowing, but it happens every winter so we do know about the problem. The question God will ask us, the question we have to ask ourselves, is not "did we know?" but, "did we care?" I wonder whether, for those who died in this way, it was the awareness of the cold or the feeling that nobody

cared which made their deaths less bearable?

If Britain really is too poor to safeguard the elderly from the cold in an effective way then its high time we stopped spending money on less deserving causes. If, on the other hand, we can afford to safeguard them effectively but we do not, then there is indeed something rotten in the state of Britain.

LOOK BOTH WAYS

You know how we teach children their road drill: "Look right, look left, look right again," before crossing the road? Well, maybe we could adapt that drill to our own prayerful thoughts in Lent along the lines of: "Look forward, look backward, look forward again." Lent is a time for reflection, for allowing myself time to learn life's lessons and profit by them in future.

I look forward to see, as far as can be, where I am going and why and how and with whom. I look backward to see, as far as can be, where I am now, where I came from and why and how and with whom. I look forward again, but this time more aware of myself, my strong and weak points, my motivation, my needs, my hopes, and I gain strength from recognizing and accepting the truth about myself past, present and future. This reflective exercise, it is prayer in fact, helps me to go onward into the future with greater confidence. So "on yer bikes" for Lent!

*O King of the Friday
Whose limbs were stretched
on the cross,
O Lord who did suffer
The bruises, the wounds and the loss,
We stretch ourselves
Beneath the shield of thy might.
Some fruit from the tree of*

thy passion
Fall on us this night!

PSSST!

That man (you know the one I mean? Him in the office, what-his-name? I have it — Hearne, Father Hearne.) Well, that man has had an idea. Now I admit that for him it is quite an achievement and it happens only every five years or so. Anyway it might make it easier for you to write to us and easier for us to deal with your letters. I hope he's right. It isn't often we can please everybody! So we'll work it out in detail and let you know later in the year.

We'd both like to thank those of you who sent in back copies of the Carmelite News. Please carry on sending them as we are still without many issues. We'd also like to thank those of you who found us new readers — after consulting them, of course! That's the stuff. Keep it up.

ST. PATRICK

Once more we come to the feast of the Patron of Ireland. Once more we ask desperately for an end to injustice and violence and an end to the contempt of other people's needs that breeds injustice and violence: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Perhaps we ourselves could make a special effort to eradicate from our own lives the bitterness, the vindictiveness, the fear that hurt engenders. As we look at "The North" and its problems, let us not be blind to its parallels in our own lives, both the bad and the good.

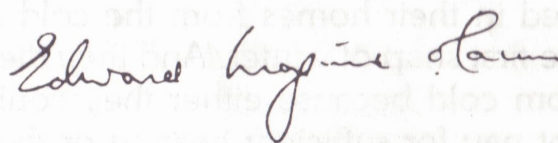
Think of all those people who continue to live good lives, genuinely god-fearing, charitable people, on both sides of the divide. Think of the leaders who genuinely work with enormous patience, courage, faith and hope for peace and reconciliation. Both of these are an example for us to follow in our own lives.

RENEWAL

As the Winter gives way to Spring each year, so may it be with us. Easter — life renewed, and Pentecost — the Spirits abiding presence to bring about that renewal, remind us that all will be well, "All manner of things shall be well." Let us encourage each other in every way.

Until next time.

Our Lady Keep You,



Edward Maquire, O. Carm.

NOVENAS OF MASSES

St. Patrick

March 9th-17th

St. Joseph

March 19th-27th

Easter

April 19th-27th

St. Jude

May 1st-9th