

Sunday First Sunday of Christmas 29 December 2013

Readings for today: *Isa 63.7-9, Heb 2.10-end, Matt 2:13-23*

New Year Resolution or Revolution?

It's the last Sunday of the year. It feels as if Christmas went past pretty quickly. After all that preparation, it seems to have gone by in a flash! I hope you haven't lost the Christmas spirit. We are already beginning to look ahead to the New Year, and to 2014! **Have you made any New Year Resolutions?** What are resolutions all about? I'm always in two minds about them, because I don't want to fail, if I don't keep them, and I'm never sure what kinds of things to resolve to do. They have to be realistic, something that I am going to manage to do. Not too big a challenge but something that will make my life different from what it was before....;

As Christians we should resolve to do something that will be good for somebody else. A random act of kindness, or being good to our neighbour, or try to smile more often and be cheerful!

As is the tradition in the newspapers in the lull that often happens now between Christmas and New Year, there are a number of reviews of the year gone by. The Times newspaper for one elects its **Person of the Year 2013**.

Did anyone see who is the Times Person of the Year?

It is gratifying to read that this year they have chosen Pope Francis as Times "Person of the year".

His is regarded as a force for change, choosing to adopt a more frugal lifestyle, with a focus on the poor which has given his ministry a sharp sense of purpose. He is quoted as saying, "*I prefer a church that is bruised and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and clinging to its own security.*"

Great that the media has taken an interest in what the man has to say! Sometimes it seems like the church is a spent force and the media only wants to stir up gossip or thinks the church has nothing worthwhile to say in today's world.

So it is great that Pope Francis has won such acclaim.

Our own Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby too, is reported in the same day's paper,...pointing out that greed and selfishness have not yet gone away. In his Christmas message, calling on us to challenge the causes of poverty.

And so to our readings for today: If today's gospel was in the newspaper, we could hardly call it good news! Herod setting out to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and surrounds!

It is not an easy one to read. It is a bit of a shock after the warm and cosy glow of Christmas. We are more used to Christmas, a sweet and glorious event, offering hope,... angels singing, a baby born, time for rejoicing.

And yet here we have only days later in our readings set aside for this Sunday,... a gruesome story about Herod the King, sending his soldiers to do away with all the babies in Bethlehem because he felt threatened?

Why do we have to listen to it this weekend, so soon after the good news of Jesus' birth, that we all would want to celebrate...?

We might wonder why Matthew chose to include this passage at all ?

But on the other hand, like Pope Francis and Justin, it shows a clear emphasis on the reality of the world. Not the gloss on Christmas that we usually see.

Matthew emphasizes for us that Jesus was born into a difficult (violent) world, and he died in a difficult world.

We might at times, think that our world is little improved; children are still killed in the Middle east, Syria, People are still dying in conflicts, still living as refugees in squalid conditions, trying to escape to a better place to bring up their children,... just like Mary and Joseph with their new baby.

We are reminded that Christmas is not just about the soft and starry traditions, the beautiful music, the soft candlelight.

But God sent his son Jesus, as a human baby, just as vulnerable and precious, just like every one of us,... to grow to manhood and live among us.... to share in our difficult world.

God does not enter into the world to work his divine power, but instead invites us to **share his dream**... of a world transformed, for people who learn to live differently,... one day live in peace,... who with Him can bring about a **new world** of light, out of dark times.

All good leaders have a dream, a vision for better times. Pope Francis and our Archbishop have lead the way in their call to attend to the poor, and giving hope that things might be different in our world; that things might change for those who struggle. Might we follow their example and, with God, hope to bring about the transformation He looks for,... the world of peace and prosperity he wants for his people.

So as we put the old year to bed, what will our New Year Resolutions be?

Let us be thankful for another new beginning, to start afresh, looking ahead to better times, knowing that whatever happens, God is with us.

May we trust in him and live in his hope, through Jesus his Son, Emmanuel.

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