



Dear Friend of Saint Jude and valued friend of the Carmelites

As you read our Christmas newsletter, the hours of night are lengthening and daylight shortening. We are feeling the cold more, especially as we are being so careful about our energy bills, and we look forward to longer days. I hope you are wrapping up well, keeping safe and also looking out for others.

Light beyond darkness

The winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere - the longest night and shortest day of the year in terms of daylight - is on 22 December. The winter solstice was regarded in some pre-Christian cultures as the Nativity of the Sun. They had a festival to celebrate the sun conquering the darkness of winter. Winter was coming to an end and spring was coming. As people who look

for light beyond darkness, it is salutary that the date chosen to celebrate the birth of Christ falls at this turning-point when daylight gradually increases.

No one knows the actual birth date of Jesus. There are records in the year AD 200 indicating that his birthday was celebrated on 6th January. The first recorded date of Christmas being celebrated on 25th December was in AD 336, during the time of Constantine. A few years later, Pope Julius I officially declared that the birth of Jesus would be celebrated on 25 December.

Christians celebrate the birth of the Son of God, “the unconquered Son”. In Old Testament prophecies, the one who is to come to liberate humanity from

darkness, oppression and sin is called the “Sun of Righteousness”. Jesus’ coming into our world signals that the long-awaited Messiah will bring enlightenment, freedom, and ultimately hope to the lives of all who accept him and his message. He invites us, through our relationship with him, to allow ourselves to be completely orientated towards the experience of a self-giving love that brings about transformation in ourselves and our world. Christ is the Light of the world, and it is right that we rejoice and celebrate his birth with gratitude.

Led to the vulnerable

Just as the story of the birth of Jesus marks a new beginning for the whole of humanity, so too new possibilities open for each of us when we gaze deeply



into the true meaning of the Incarnation and allow it to give us a new perspective on others and ourselves. Perhaps we are to be like those three pilgrims, the Maji of the Epiphany - in the Nativity story, who follow a star of enlightenment without being able to name it or fully understand what it is, but find ourselves led into a situation of vulnerable affection and love. As the three seekers were led to an exposed baby in a simple shed in a conflict-torn territory, we too may find ourselves being led to the most vulnerable in our society and world to discover the depths of what it means to love fully and be fully human. It is in simplicity and in the humblest situations that the gift of love can be exchanged.

Saint Jude Celebrations

Despite the rain over the weekend, our celebrations of Saint Jude at his shrine on 28-29 October were once again a tremendous opportunity

to re-connect with friends of Saint Jude who had come to offer thanks for his inspiration. Despite intermittent rain, spirits were not dampened. Carmelite friars – Richard Copsey, Kevin Melody, Paul de Groot, Tony O’Donnell, Richard Green and I – were delighted to spend time with pilgrims who really engaged in opening themselves to the hope that God offers us through the example of Saint Jude. At each of the Masses, everyone was anointed with blessed oil in a symbolic gesture of desire to become ambassadors of hope. Saint Jude is the apostle of hope offering the good news that God’s love is unrestricted, inclusive, welcoming and excludes no one. We prayed for those friends of the shrine who were not able to be physically with us but who are united with us through our newsletter. We thank those who were also able to join us online in preparation for the feast day through

our live-streamed novena. Of course, we would not have been able to have such a good celebration without all the hard work by Matt Betts and his team of staff, volunteers, friends and parishioners.

Francis Kemsley, O.Carm.

It is with profound sadness that I write that Fr. Francis Kemsley (pictured opposite), died on 8 October 2023. He was known to many friends of Saint Jude during his time as chaplain to the shrine. Born on 30 December 1954, throughout his Carmelite life he was friendly, approachable, compassionate and kind. He was at ease with people from any walk of life or background.

Francis’ health had been poor for some time. He was admitted to hospital on 28 September and our hope had been that he would return to his community strengthened and helped to continue his Carmelite life the best way he could.

This was not to be. His last battle was beyond him, and he slipped away peacefully praying the words of the Lord's Prayer. In recent times, Francis had been reflecting on the beautiful love story in the Song of Songs. We pray that his final journey will take him to that place where what was an aspiration becomes an experience of the fullness of the Beloved's love. The Requiem for Francis was celebrated on 26 October – just two days before Saint Jude's feast day. During November we prayed for his repose in the heart of God and for that of all whose names were sent to the Shrine of Saint Jude to be remembered in our November list of the dead. May Francis and all our loved ones rest in peace and rise in glory.

New Carmelite Foundation

You may remember that we began a new Carmelite community in Reading in August 2022. It is with great pleasure that I share the news that we have now also made a new foundation near Newcastle in the Northeast of England. Two Carmelite friars, Damian Cassidy and Paul Jenkins, were the first friars to move there on 14 September, the Feast of the Transfiguration, and are settling in well. We are looking forward to a Mass there on 6 December when Bishop Stephen Wright will preside and, together with the local people, formally welcome the Carmelites. Please keep this new venture in your prayer.

Other initiatives

A group of young adults journeyed from the

shrine to Canterbury on 21 October. Despite the regular downpour they had a very blessed pilgrimage walk (see below). Rooted in prayer, connecting with creation and accompanying each other, they were preparing for the Camino de Santiago next April during Easter week. If you know any young adult who would like to join them, visit: www.carmelite.org/camino-2024.

In our last newsletter I wrote about our developing links with Lithuania. Carmelites, including Br. Richard Green (UK), together with Sean Ford (Ireland) and Mariusz Placek (Poland), were able to visit groups of lay people who are connected to our Carmelite family and shared a weekend retreat with them in November. From small seeds come great fruit.



From Advent to Christmas

Pope Francis reminds us: *“Advent invites us to a commitment to vigilance, looking beyond ourselves, expanding our mind and heart in order to open ourselves up to the needs of people, of brothers and sisters, and to the desire for a new world.”* He has also said, *“God does not close the door, but invites us to enter; he does not keep us at a distance but welcomes us.”* Through your prayer and generosity, you enable

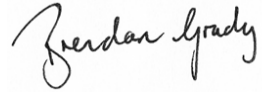
us to encourage a spirit of hope through practical endeavours. During Advent and at Christmas we will hold you in our hearts in prayer.

The message of God’s love continues to knock at the doors of people’s hearts, reshaping human horizons. Let us allow space for a spiritual reawakening to God this Christmas. As God can see the Christ in us, maybe we might see the Christ who comes to us in

disguise in the multitude of vulnerable others as we surrender to the impact of God’s love this Christmas.

Thank you for all you do to support the Carmelites, as together we see light beyond darkness.

Happy Christmas!



Brendan Grady, O.Carm.
Prior Provincial



This December, we need your help for our initiative ‘St. Jude Everywhere’. Can you walk twelve miles wherever

you are for our ‘St. Jude Everywhere’ sponsored walk? Walk the twelve miles one day, over a week, or over the month of December. Whatever you can do!

All money raised will help fund our work in the UK and abroad.

If you would like to join us, please sign up via our details below, and we can

send you a sponsorship form. Alternatively, you can raise the money and add your donation via our online page: tinyurl.com/JudeEverywhere or send with the intentions sheet.

If you are unable to join us, but want to support the walkers, please donate via the link above or send a donation on the intentions sheet. THANK YOU.

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