

From Archbishop Vincent Diocesan Christmas Message

This November a marvellous pilgrimage to the Holy Land was shared by 100 people from our Diocese. We visited Nazareth, Jerusalem and, of course, Bethlehem. Thoughts and prayers constantly filled our hearts and minds. Some among us had the skill to write them down, loving and poetically – words such as these:

“At the window... Mary’s home... the archangel Gabriel ... kneels alone awesome ... beautiful ... filled with love’s greeting... captured and bound... his architectural strength spills pools of brilliant rainbow light across the floor and the power of the most high stoops into the shadows of our life saying... ‘Come my love’....and we walk with Mary to welcome Christ... in Joseph’s home.”

Yes, indeed, the power of the most high stoops into the shadows of our lives in that stable in Bethlehem. So we too stooped low to kiss the silver cross that marks the place of Christ’s birth.

And we will do so before the crib this Christmas. In our churches, we kneel before our new born Saviour, our hearts full of thoughts and prayers.

Take your time there. See in the images of the crib the great act of God’s loving humility, coming to us in poverty so



that we may not be overwhelmed by God’s majesty but drawn to God’s love.

As you see the outstretched arms of the child hear again those words of invitation: ‘Come then, my love, my lovely one, come. For see, the winter is past the rains are over and gone.’ These are indeed the words of the Lord to each one of us. He continues: ‘Show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful.’ (Song of Songs 2.10-14)

Here is the invitation of Christmas: that the Lord, in coming to us, wants above all to draw us to himself. He loves us, each of us, in our hidden selves, more than we could ever know. In his sight we are beautiful of face and sweet of voice. We may not think so. But he sees us with fresh, Christmas eyes. He sees deep into the soul given to each one of us by his heavenly Father and beautiful beyond measure.

Let us open our hearts to him, respond to his invitation, allow the life of our soul to breathe with a fresh grace, the grace that comes with forgiveness and repentance, the grace which enables us to rise from our knees with new heart, new hope and new love.

I wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas. Please keep your priests in your prayers this Christmas, as you are in theirs, and include me among them too.

May God bless you all.

+ Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster.

Living Water

Fr Robin writes on the centrality of contemplation in Christian life.

“NO, I’ve never heard that!” I was dismayed to hear these words one Saturday afternoon when walking around central London. My wife’s sister had come down from Birmingham and we were walking around the university area, on our way to visit the Foundling Hospital Museum in Brunswick Square (a little known attraction well worth seeking out). A

smartly dressed young woman came up to us and asked if we knew how to find a Buddhist Peace Centre somewhere nearby. She showed us the address on a card which invited people to an afternoon on meditation. “Oh, so you’re interested in meditation?” I asked. “Yes,” she said, and explained, “because I want to know God and myself better.” “Did you know that there is a Christian way of meditation?” “No, I’ve never heard of that! I didn’t know there was such a thing,” was the answer.

This response, though disappointing, is not surprising. There have always been a few (usually regarded as eccentrics) who go off to join other faiths and cultures than their own, but for some years now many people of all kinds and all ages, but



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perhaps mostly younger people, brought up in the Christian culture of the West have been seeking spiritual enlightenment – “getting to know God and myself better” (the two go together) - through the great faiths of the East or through dubious New Age practices. When it is Catholics who have been through preparation for baptism and confirmation, attended Catholic schools, been altar servers, regular at mass and so on, one cannot but ask why they turn away from this upbringing. There are certainly elements of fashion here (the Beatles and TM), but there is also a genuine desire for something that they have simply not found or been offered in their own tradition, the one in which they have been brought up.

You would think that a religion and the churches set up to promote that religion are in the business of helping people to know and grow in the spiritual dimension of their lives and their human selves – to know God and themselves better. What else could a church be for? In the West, however, since the time of the Reformation the divided churches, in their mutual antagonism, have been primarily concerned with maintaining and defending their differences. They have accordingly emphasised most of all the externals of religion, the things that define a tribal religious identity. They give people doctrines to believe in, observances and rituals to take part in, prayers to say, moral codes to uphold and, of course, authorities to submit to who validate all this activity. The question is not so much, Does this help you to know God? as, Are you being a loyal Catholic/Protestant/whatever you think you need to be?

As far as it goes religious activity can be quite laudable, it may create a desire for God, but it will not necessarily in itself meet that desire, because knowing God is not a matter of believing or saying or doing the right things (those a church has decided are right), it is a matter of knowing the reality that is at the centre of your and all being – that is who God is (to Moses he calls himself ‘I am who I am’).

The simple desire to know God, which is the true heart and purpose of religion, is something that may be sidelined and neglected, submerged under others concerns which religion may be pressed into meeting, but being so fundamental to our human make-up it cannot be denied. It is never lost sight of, but re-emerges from time to time in extraordinary ways – the very remarkable, improbable flowering of English mysticism in the 14th century, the Spanish Carmelites of the 16th. These are aspects of what is called the contemplative tradition within our religion - contemplation and contemplative prayer as presence to God, not just talking to God or even thinking about God, but being present to him in the faith that he is present to us.

In our day too great teachers have appeared who have recognised the centrality of contemplation in Christian life and found ways of making the practice of contemplation available to the people of the Church at large – as the heart of religion it is not confined to those thought to be especially holy or advanced in spiritual maturity, but is for everyone. It is the religious orders that traditionally have practised and maintained the contemplative way, but they too have been overly caught up in the institutionalising and professionalising of our religion that is characteristic of Western Christianity, much to the detriment of the orders' real value for the Church. Neglect of the contemplative way, needless to say, is at the root of the myriad difficulties that institutional structures run into when their heart is missing.

The Cistercian monks of St. Joseph's Abbey at Spencer, Massachusetts used to find a succession of mostly young visitors fetching up at the monastery who were looking for a Buddhist retreat-house in that area teaching Insight Meditation. Like the woman I met in London these young Americans had been brought up in a Christian culture (Americans, as we know, are very religious people), but had not found there the path to enlightenment they were seeking. Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating and their fellow monks began to think how they could

offer that path out of their own Christian traditions, but realised that if they were to do so they had first to reconnect with the contemplative way for themselves, since despite being part of a religious order they had lost sight of it as much as anyone else. Out of that discovery came the teaching of what is called Centring Prayer that is growing and spreading wherever people simply want to know God. It was developed out of the rich resources of the Christian contemplative tradition, especially in this case the medieval English classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Starting at the end of January 2012 we are offering at the Benedictine Study and Arts Centre a series of eight evenings exploring some of the key moments of this tradition in its early stages. Sessions will begin with silent prayer and then a guest speaker will set out the teaching of a representative figure. There will be a time for responses and questions. The speakers are knowledgeable and experienced in their chosen field, not professional academics, but amateurs in the best sense of the term. Details of the course follow. It will be part of an ever increasing movement, unconfined to any one denomination (some call it the Emerging Church), of people rediscovering and reconnecting with the truest Christian sources – no less than the presence of God within, the “spring of living water within you gushing up to eternal life” which Jesus causes to flow in the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. This movement offers the surest hope for the future health and vitality of the Christian religion and so for the world which Christians share with all God's people.

Fr. Robin Burgess

SPRINGS OF LIVING WATER:

TEACHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATIVE WAY

A series of eight sessions with guest speakers exploring the contribution of significant figures from the early centuries who help us to have a real relationship with God through prayer and silence. Each session will include a time of meditation, refreshments and an opportunity for questions/comments

Venue: the Benedictine Study and Arts Centre, 74 Castlebar Road, Ealing, W5 2DD

Time: Wednesday evenings 7 to 9 pm, January to March 2012

Schedule:

25 January: Scriptural Origins – Liz Watson

1 February: The Desert Tradition – Kim Nataraja

8 February: Ephraem the Syrian – Isabelle Glover

15 February: St. Augustine – Margaret Lane

- half-term -

29 February: St. Benedict – Robin Burgess

7 March: Meister Eckhart – tba

14 March: Julian of Norwich – Gina Garrett

21 March: The English Mystics – Stefan Reynolds

To enrol please email: enquiries@bsac.ac.uk or telephone 020 8862 2156

We invite a donation of £5 per session.

An Interview with Abbot Martin

First published in the Universe 27th November 2011.

by journalist Finbar O'Donovan

What is your reaction to Lord Carlile's Report?

Lord Carlile's report does not make very pretty reading, in fact, what it contains is a source of shame for us. That is why we have accepted the recommendations in the report and are doing everything that we can to prevent anything like this happening again.

Can you describe these measures?

First of all, we have taken a great deal of expert advice on safeguarding and we now have in place trained safeguarding teams for the school, the abbey and the parish.

The school has detailed safeguarding policies and procedures which meet with the approval of the Department for Education and the Independent Schools Inspectorate. The parish, of course, follows the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service policy and guidelines and the NSPCC are advising the Abbey on procedures. All key staff have had safeguarding training to the appropriate level.

Lord Carlile advised that the governance of St Benedict's School was, to be frank, no longer fit for purpose and that the school should become an educational charity, quite separate from the Abbey Trust.

Work has already started on this and everything should be in place by September 2012. The new governing body of the school cannot take over formally until the educational trust is established, but the transition will start shortly and an interim governing body, or governing body designate, will gradually assume responsibility for the school.

The governing body will have a lay chairman and monks will be in the minority. New governors will be recruited with the appropriate expertise and experience.

Over and above what Lord Carlile has recommended, I have commissioned an independent safeguarding expert to make unannounced inspections of the safeguarding arrangements in the school, parish and abbey.

It is on record that abuse occurred over many years, why was nothing done about it?

Hindsight makes everything clear, but in years gone past there was a general unwillingness to accept that such things could happen so that the children themselves found it difficult to find anyone to listen to them.

The result was that often enough there was only gossip and rumour and little fact on which to act.

That is why we have our present safeguarding structures in the Church, so that people are trained to notice, to listen and to act.

In his report, Lord Carlile states St Benedict's rule of love and forgiveness appears to have overshadowed responsibility for children's welfare. Is this the case?

This I think, refers to my decision to allow Fr David Pearce to continue living in the monastery after a civil claim for abuse had succeeded against him.

I could have sent him away, but that would have meant that someone about whom I had justifiable concerns would have been living without any supervision. I judged that it was safer if he remained in the monastery where we could be sure that he had no contact with the school or parish and thus with young people.

As it turned out, I made a grave error of judgement and can blame no-one but myself. What I was attempting was much more difficult than I had expected and a young man was put in harm's way as a result.

Is the situation as bad as has been reported in the national press?

In some ways, yes, in others no. As I have already said, I am making no excuse and I don't seek to minimise what happened in the past.

The press are quite right to report this. However, some reporting has given the impression that abuse has been taking place up to the present day. Editorial comments have sometimes appeared to be biased against the school, again dwelling upon what happened in the past with no recognition of the school as it is today. Certainly since I have been abbot and since Christopher Cleugh, the present headmaster has been in post, which is over a decade, there have been no suggestions of abuse in the school.

Why was Lord Carlile chosen to carry out the inquiry into events at St Benedict's School?

As the situation unfolded, I quickly realised that I was out of my depth, that I needed guidance from professional people with experience in dealing with safeguarding matters in schools and within the Church.

I had benefit of advice from a number of people from within the Church and others with no connection to the Church, including a senior social worker who has carried out high-level investigations into the Church in Ireland.

The consensus of advice was that a thorough independent investigation into past events was required, and Lord Carlile was recommended as someone eminently suitable to carry out that investigation. He has a track record of in depth investigations and has extensive experience in child abuse cases.

t has been widely reported in the press that (former Ealing monk) Fr Laurence Soper is on the run from the police. What exactly are the circumstances?

That is the case. For the past 12 years, he was working as bursar at the Benedictine University in Rome. Back in March, he agreed to return to England for an appointment with the police.

He had returned at the request of the police on two or three previous occasions, it was a matter of trust. In March, he abused that trust. He left the monastery in Rome, ostensibly to come to London and he hasn't been seen since.

Don't you have any idea where he could be?

He could be anywhere, I have absolutely no idea. I have notified religious houses where he had stayed in the past about the situation, no one has any idea where he is. We have given every possible assistance to the police and we urge him to contact the police so that they can deal with allegations against him. He is an embarrassment to the Order of St Benedict and to the Church. He betrayed the trust placed in him by the police.

Should you resign as Abbot?

That is something I have thought about every day. As I have already said, I made one serious error of judgement but aside from that, all of the cases highlighted in the report happened in the past, many in the distant past, and all before my watch. The community has confidence in the measures I have taken and want me to see this through. Before I complete my term as Abbot I want to ensure that everything that needs to be done is in place for my successor.

What future do you see for the Benedictines in Ealing?

There have been times in recent months when I have wondered if Ealing Abbey has any future at all.

But if I step back from the immediate train of events I can see a school that has flourished in the past decade and which is larger and more successful than ever despite the stain of its past.

As for the monastery, we will prosper if we can show that we have learned from this terrible story, that we can confront the past and be better people and better monks for it.

If you have concerns relating to the matters touched on in this interview you are always welcome to speak with Fr Abbot or Fr Peter or with one of our parish safeguarding representatives.

Catholic Politics

Local councillor and former Mayor Ian Potts writes on Issues that cross party political lines.

As a Catholic Politician, I have never accepted that we should keep out of Politics, but that as a community we should not be involved in Party Politics. In fact I am trying to set up a non-partisan group for Catholic politicians, under the patronage of our most renowned catholic politician St Thomas More.

At the moment there are two contentious issues that concern us in politics, which I would like to encourage you to contact your MP about. For most of the parish this is Angie Bray the MP for Central Ealing and Acton; however if you live in the North West corner of the parish (Cleveland Ward) then Steve Pound, the MP for Ealing North is your MP. If you come to church from outside the parish your MP may be Virendra Sharma the MP for Ealing Southall (Southall, South Hanwell and the Northfields area of Ealing) or if from Greenford or North Hanwell your MP is also Steve Pound. All MP's can be contacted at the House of Commons, Westminster, SW1A 0AA.

The two issues are firstly the proposal to allow "Homosexual Marriage". Clearly as Catholics we do not believe that such an idea is possible. What I suggest is that we should follow the European practice and separate the legal and religious issues involved in relationships. Let the state make its own rules and organise registration for all relationships for such purposes as inheritance and tax. Then leave it to the religious and other bodies to decide on their rules for marriage, which the state should not interfere with.

Secondly in a recent parliamentary reply the Under Secretary of State for Health said “local authorities will be required by regulations to commission ... appropriate access to contraception and abortion services”. We are afraid this may mean that we will have “abortion on the rates” again something we would oppose. It is possible that this will only apply to advice services but even this gives us concern.

Again can I urge you to be active in political life? If we do not get involved then we can not complain if other people take decisions that we do not approve of.

Ian M. Potts, Cllr.

PAX ROMANA

(cf: Mt 2:16. Wis 6: 1 - 11)

His regal sceptre set fair, Pilate Prince of Rome
To try and condemn Our Lord on spurious charges;
Alas! But where was this justice of Imperial Rome
When Herod her servant massacred the Innocents?

Benjamin Takavarasha

Annus Mirabilis

Parishioner Barbara Murray who has been going on pilgrimage to Lourdes for over 50 years. Here she reflects on the blessings and challenges of pilgrimage. We all know about the forthcoming Diamond Jubilee of the Queen and the Olympic Games, but 2012 will also be the centenary year of the founding of the Society of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The Society was founded in 1912 to promote devotion to Our Lady and to arrange pilgrimages, services, retreats, etc. to that end. Apart from the years of Wars I and II there has been a pilgrimage to Lourdes every year since then. These used to be called the English National Pilgrimage and comprised groups from most of the English Dioceses and pilgrims from Scotland, Wales and Ireland. As the years went on the various Dioceses started their own pilgrimages, mainly with the expertise learned from us. We, like good parents watched our children grow up and become independent but we continued to organize our annual pilgrimage of the sick and take up to 100 sick and elderly pilgrims to Lourdes, and also arrange other pilgrimages, services, retreats and fund raising events throughout the year.

I joined the Society back in the 1950s as a helper and I still go every year, but now as a sick pilgrim. When I first joined we travelled by boat and train, assembling at Victoria Station. The journey took about twenty-four hours during which we had to care for and provide meals for all our sick pilgrims. We arrived, tired but happy in Lourdes, and for the next few days continued to work for our sick pilgrims: bed making, ward cleaning, serving meals, etc, and accompanying them to services and events.

Over the years I have made wonderful friends, both the sick and the helpers, many of them have died and I look forward to seeing them again when my time comes.

I was eventually promoted to be in charge of the catering arrangements, which involved packing over a dozen wooden

boxes with groceries and equipment brought from England to supply the pilgrimage for the week. We had to produce three meals during the journey and then special diets and extras to supplement the meals provided in Lourdes. Being English we could not function without tea continually on the go so there was always a fuel urn available outside our little kitchenette.

The return journey was a reverse of the outward journey with three meals to be prepared and served en route. We finally arrived back at Victoria, tired, dirty, but spiritually uplifted to go our separate ways. "See you next year" we said as we parted. Over the years the memories of all the pilgrimages become blurred and merge into one great feeling of spiritual uplift, love and companionship: in short: "the Lourdes experience."

Our journeys to Lourdes now are by air – not so long and arduous – and the accommodation in Lourdes in the new state of the art *Acceuil de Notre Dame* is so much more comfortable but the spirit and companionship formed over the years has not changed. As long as Our Blessed Lady is there to welcome us we will keep going back. Come and join us and see for yourselves.

The 2010 pilgrimage is from May 31-June 6.

A New Parish Candidate for the Permanent Diaconate

Ian Edwards is in the first year of a three year formation and discernment programme, leading to ordination as a permanent deacon in the archdiocese of Westminster in 2014.

Hello! The observant amongst you will have seen the notice in one of the mass bulletins in September that I had been selected for the formation programme as a permanent deacon. In September I started my first set of lectures at St John's Seminary, Womersley. This is my first year on the programme and the academic studies started off gently with an introduction to theology and a not so gentle 1500 word essay. This was a bit of shock to the system as it had been quite a few years since I had to produce anything like this. On Sunday 11 December at the midday mass here at Ealing Abbey I and three men from other parishes in the Westminster Diocese were admitted as Candidates for Holy Orders. In future years, God willing, we will be instituted into the ministries of lector and acolyte. These are important milestones on the path to ordination. During this first year my academic studies will cover the study of scripture, sacraments and liturgy, philosophy and moral theology and the Diaconate ministry. As well a monthly study day at St. John's seminary there are also three residential weekends each year, regular meetings with my academic tutor, spiritual director, pastoral director and the director of formation for the archdiocese of Westminster. So I have a very busy time ahead. In the New Year I'll be getting more involved with the Saturday evening mass serving alongside the other altar servers.

Many of you know that we are already blessed to have one Permanent Deacon in our parish, Deacon Gordon Nunn. But do you know what a deacon is and does? Well here is a short summary...

There are three levels of holy orders in the Catholic Church. The diaconate is the first level; it functions as the service ministry of Christ. In other words, deacons are servants, called to embody the work of Christ in service of justice, the Word and the altar. There are as many ways of serving as there are deacons. All deacons can baptize, witness marriages, bring the viaticum to the dying, and preside at funerals, bless objects and people. They proclaim the Gospel and may serve as the homilist at Mass. Some deacons are 'permanent' deacons. That is, they do not go on for ordination as priests because they do not believe they are called in that way.

Next time you see me in Church please do stop and say hello. You can also email me at ianedwards@rcdow.org.uk if you have any questions about my formation for ordination as a permanent deacon, which you as a parishioner are part of. Please do get in touch! Thank you to everyone who is supportive with prayer and encouragement. **Ian.**

Bereavement support in the Parish.

What is the point of offering bereavement support in the Parish? Surely people cope with the help of their families and friends! This is very often true, but there are people who for various reasons are unable to seek or receive support from those people closest to them. This can be because such people are grieving too. It can be helpful to have a someone who is not personally involved who is able to listen uncritically to what a grieving person wants to say without trying to 'make things better'. To do this the helper has to try to remain detached but not indifferent.

Most people who have suffered a bereavement do not need formal counselling, but they sometimes need a listening ear of someone who is able and willing to spend time with them. That a Parish should offer such support is surely following the example Jesus' compassion towards those who were suffering in any way (e.g. Matthew 25:31-41).

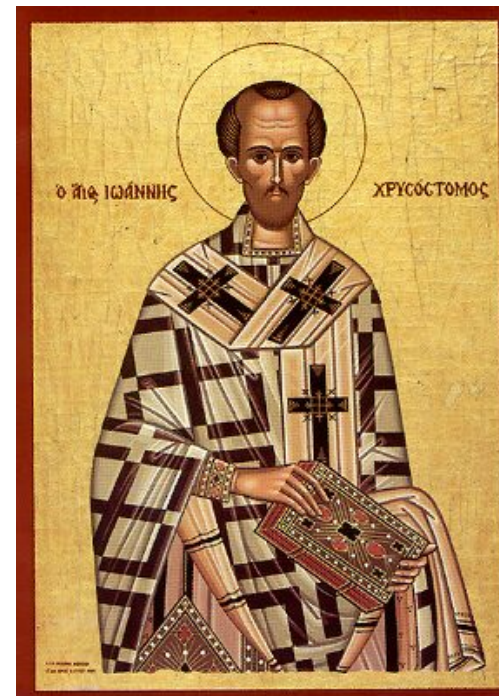
Loneliness is a prominent feature when someone is grieving for the loss of a husband or wife perhaps after many years of marriage. If they have no family near, to have a visit or even a telephone call from someone in the parish could be of great comfort. If the person is housebound the need could be even greater.

Parishioners who would like to volunteer to help in this service do not have to have any specific academic qualifications, but they do need to be compassionate, able to listen and really to hear what the

other person is saying. They also need to realise that they haven't all the answers, or maybe any answers except that they are there in a non judgemental way to help the person who needs them.

Sr Mary Woodall, of the Little Company of Mary

St John Chrysostom



The Benet Club

The Benet Club is situated in the Parish Centre adjacent to the Abbey Church and has recently been refurbished.

The following is a statement of purpose for the Benet Club

‘The Club serves parishioners and friends of Ealing Abbey and parents of St Benedict’s School. It aims to be a family friendly club where guests can feel relaxed and comfortable, able to socialise with old fiends and make new ones.

The strategy for the future is to form a users committee to provide suggestions to the manager and the Trust towards its use’.

If you would be interested in serving on this committee please contact the parish office.

The Benet Club Opening Times

Monday to Friday	6.30 pm – 11.00 pm
Saturday	6.45 pm – 11.00 pm
Sunday	11.30 am – 2.30 pm 7.00 pm – 10.30 pm

Membership of the club is now free and the manager Mr Giovanni Persano regulary organises functions such as Burns Night, St Patrick’s Night, Quiz nights, New Year’s Eve for which tickets may be purchased at the bar.

The club is available for hire for private functions, meetings, receptions, birthdays, baptisms and weddings with catering services available.

Please drop in for a chat and application form.

Giovanni is also available on 020 8862 2168

Email benetclub@ealingabbey.org.uk

Infinitas Gracias Mexican Miracle Paintings

6th October 2011 – 26 February 2012

Wellcome Collection 183 Euston Rd. Tues – Sunday open until 6.00 pm and 10.00 on Thursdays. Admission free.

In the narthex of the Abbey Church we have a prayer notice board. It is very reassuring to be confident that one has the prayers of others in time of need. This exhibition is in effect a large prayer notice board but for prayers of thanksgiving. An ‘ex-voto’ as the pictures and testimonies in this exhibition are called are votive offerings given in gratitude in fulfilment of vows (hence the Latin term, short for ex voto suscepto, ‘from the vow made’). They have originally been placed in churches or chapels and an important part of the offering is the making of a pilgrimage to the chapel.

Testimony is an important element in making these offerings. There is acknowledgement of divine intervention in answer to petitionary prayer, either to the Lord, or for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin or some other saint. These are mostly painted on tin roof tiles and are of very uniform dimensions. There are over a hundred in the exhibition selected from museum collections in central Mexico and from churches in the mining communities of Guanajuato and Real de Catorce. They are often painted by untutored professional ex-voto painters; usually very simple scenes depicting the miracle and the saint invoked and a written account of the favour received. I found it cumulatively a very prayerful exercise to read so many faith filled records of human hardship and suffering alleviated in answer to prayer. To accompany 'Infinitas Gracias', the Wellcome Collection is commissioning professional illustrators to produce new votive images based on stories submitted by visitors to the exhibition and its website.

Perhaps we have something to learn about gratitude and faith from these simple but heartfelt pictures and prayers.