

## 'THE LIGHT OF CHRIST OVERCOMING DARKNESS IN THE CHURCH & IN SOCIETY'

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Advent 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2018

### INSIGHTS INTO RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH & THE WORLD

Around Christmas and New Year, three Papal addresses give us insights into relationships between the Catholic Church and the world.

Taken together, they show what internal and external justice issues, mission direction and faith issues are prominent.

The first of these addresses is the Pope's Christmas Message to the Roman Curia. Later will come the Christmas Message to the world, and in January the Address to diplomats.

### POPE FRANCIS CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO THE ROMAN CURIA

Pope Francis quoted St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 13:12

*"The night is far gone, the day is near.*

*Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light".*

His reflection draws on

*'the firm conviction that the light always proves stronger than the darkness.'*

We ponder what the *'armour of light'* can mean in our lives, shining the light into the darkness.

Pope Francis spoke about:

- afflictions experienced by immigrants and by martyrs today;
- the scourges of church abuse and of infidelity;
- examples from the Bible about abuse by King David and Judas;
- the commitment of the Church this coming February;
- the need for people today, like the Old Testament prophet Nathan,
- and a list of joys in the past year

### ABUSE

The secular media focused on a particular sentence in Pope Francis Address, namely

*'To those who abuse minors I would say this: convert and hand yourself over to human justice, and prepare for divine justice.'*

Pope Francis reflected on abuse by using the Old Testament account of King David, an anointed one, who committed at the same time the triple sin

*"sexual abuse, abuse of power and abuse of conscience"*

*"Today too, there are many Davids who, without batting an eye, enter into the web of corruption and betray God, his commandments, their own vocation, the Church, the people of God and the trust of little ones and their families. Often behind their*

*boundless amiability, impeccable activity and angelic faces, they shamelessly conceal a vicious wolf ready to devour innocent souls.”*

*‘This coming February, the Church will restate her firm resolve to pursue unstintingly a path of purification. She will question, with the help of experts, how best to protect children, to avoid these tragedies, to bring healing and restoration to the victims, and to improve the training imparted in seminaries. An effort will be made to make past mistakes opportunities for eliminating this scourge, not only from the body of the Church but also from that of society. For if this grave tragedy has involved some consecrated ministers, we can ask how deeply rooted it may be in our societies and in our families. Consequently, the Church will not be limited to healing her own wounds, but will seek to deal squarely with this evil that causes the slow death of so many persons, on the moral, psychological and human levels.’*

This follows on from a recent Vatican letter to participants attending the special Vatican meeting in late February 2019, on church sexual abuse.

For example, the Presidents of each national Bishops Conference in the world, are to consult with people abused by priests and religious, before attending the meeting.

## IMMIGRANTS

Pope Francis also addressed the issue of refugees and asylum seekers under the word ‘immigrants’.

*‘All those immigrants, forced to leave their own homelands and to risk their lives, lose their lives, or survive only to find doors barred and their brothers and sisters in our human family more concerned with political advantage and power!*

*All that fear and prejudice!*

*All those people, and especially those children who die each day for lack of water, food and medicine!*

*All that poverty and destitution!*

*All that violence directed against the vulnerable and against women!*

*All those theatres of war both declared and undeclared.*

*All that innocent blood spilled daily!*

*All that inhumanity and brutality around us!*

*All those persons who even today are systematically tortured in police custody, in prisons and in refugee camps in various parts of the world!’*

## GOSPEL OF LUKE 1:39-44

In today’s Gospel passage we see the courage of Mary who sets out with haste to respond to her kinswoman Elizabeth’s needs.

Mary doesn’t stay at home.

Too often as church, we have not shown the urgency of responding to serious issues of justice and transparency and accountability within the church.

We learn from Mary about trusting in God and responding quickly.  
Not easy at the time for a woman to cover such distance alone.  
She did not search for an excuse to delay, she did not procrastinate.  
The Gospel passage does not explain how she travelled.  
It concentrates on the urgency, the haste.

*'In those days Mary set out and went with haste  
to a Judean town in the hill country,  
where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.  
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb.  
And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit  
and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.  
And why has this happened to me,  
that the mother of my Lord comes to me?  
For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting,  
the child in my womb leapt for joy.  
And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment  
of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'*

May Christmas be a time of spiritual fulfilment in each of us.  
A recognition of the Light of God shining upon the darkness within us.

This Christmas, may the Holy Spirit fulfill in us  
what God has shared with us directly and indirectly through others.  
May we leap for joy this Christmas.

May we recognize the love of Jesus in our neighbour.

As we gaze upon the Christmas Crib,  
and see the figure of Jesus so, so small as a new-born baby,  
we ponder why we are tempted to buy expensive and extravagant gifts  
for ourselves and others, and why we might want such gifts ourselves.  
God sets us the example of humility.  
May we humbly overcome peer pressure around us and put Jesus first.

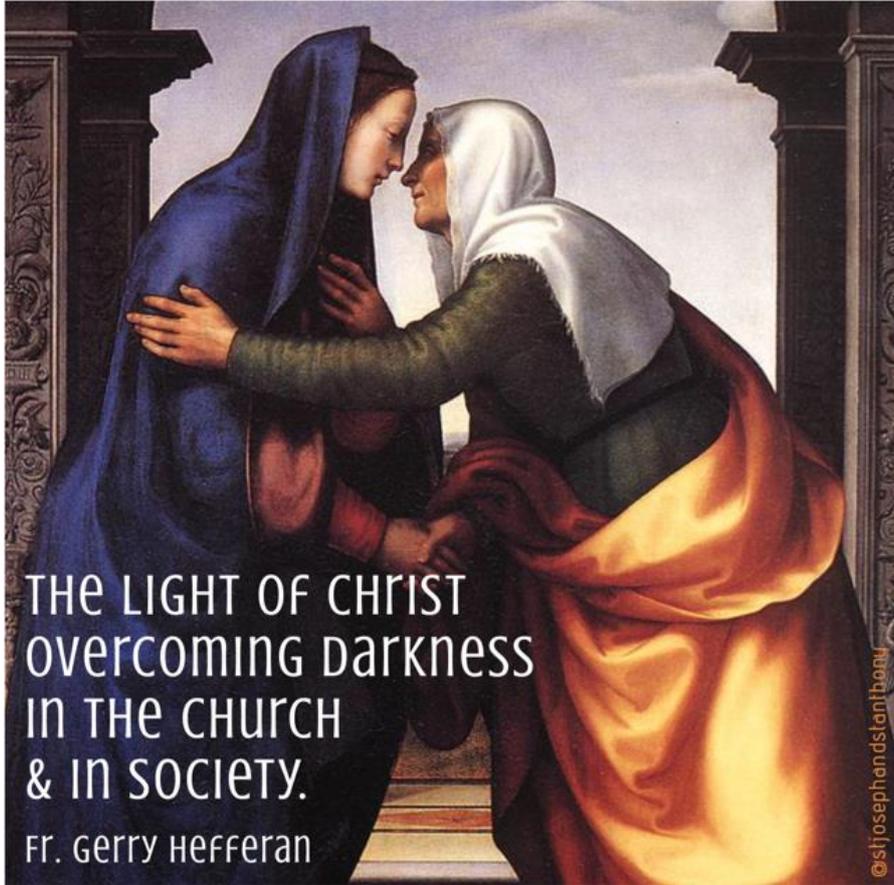
May we humbly live this Christmas, responding to Jesus as our Light.

Let us pray.

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122318.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook23122018>]



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