

PROMISE AND POSSIBILITY

At the day of reflection on Holy Island to prepare the way for Advent, we reflected on some of the Readings that we will be hearing from Isaiah and how they spoke to the people of his own day – and continue to speak to us today. His people were in exile—there seemed to be no hope of a return home and the people felt that God had abandoned them to their fate. Isaiah believed differently—and felt the word of the Lord speaking to him offering hope and promise.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis tries to explain the balance between God’s possibilities (or fullness) and our own limitations and how often they are held in a tension. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we will have the Gospel of the Annunciation. This is a moment unique in the history of the world when possibility and limitations were truly held in the balance. As Mary asked—“How could this be?” Gabriel explains—insofar as he could—and also tells her that Elizabeth is pregnant despite being “too old” for, as the angel says, “nothing is impossible to God.” And so, Mary—aware of all the limitations—of what this will do to her parents’ hopes and dreams for her—of Joseph’s probable response—the damage to her own reputation—aware of all these things and more, stakes the rest of her life on the possibilities God lays before her and says yes...



None of us will have quite such a dramatic balance between what God seems to be showing us as possibilities and our own—or our community’s—apparent limitations. Most of us will have experience of it in our own lives, though. These are the times when we are called to risk moving beyond our own “comfort zone” towards the “the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future” to which God calls us.

It can feel hugely risky but, as Pope Paul VI wrote: “Christians must be people with forward-looking imaginations ... not airy fairy but to imagine the possibilities that no-one else has yet tried or even considered.”

Advent and Christmastime remind us of the great things God has already done for humanity and remind us that he is not finished yet... 

FORWARD TOGETHER IN HOPE

BISHOP SÉAMUS’ CALL TO PRAYER



Bishop Séamus is keen that the whole process of **FORWARD TOGETHER IN HOPE** should be underpinned by prayer. There will be several opportunities for people around the Diocese to come together to pray and reflect.

Prayers are to be held at **St Mary’s Cathedral, Newcastle on Tuesday 2 December, 10:30am 12 noon** (followed by Mass) and **6:30pm - 8:00pm**.

The next session is at **St Joseph’s, Hartlepool Wednesday 10 December, 6:30pm—8:00pm**

If you are unable to attend the sessions but would like to pray in solidarity, there are prayer resources which will be available on the website or from the Department.

FORWARD TOGETHER IN HOPE PRAYER

Glory be to the Father –
in whom we live and move and have our being.

Glory be to the Son –
whose name we bear
and who calls each of us to be his disciples;
to build his Kingdom
and to go out into the world and bear its fruit.

Glory be to the Holy Spirit –
pouring out grace and guidance,
forming us and renewing us.

Inspire us all in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
to live the Gospel,
to be open to change
and to move forward together in hope.

hōcn Resources go National!

When Diana Klein, editor of *Parish Practice* in *The Tablet* heard about our diocesan Advent resources, she got in touch to ask whether we would be happy to share information about them through the column. Naturally we agreed and it appeared in *The Tablet* on the First Sunday of Advent (30 November).

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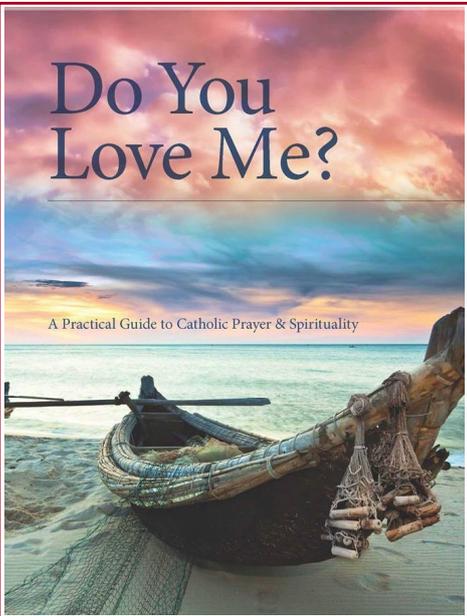
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Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer & Spirituality

November saw the publication of a new book from the Bishops' Conference Spirituality Committee, "Do You Love Me?" Kathryn was on the team who worked on it and the aim was to create a resource that individuals and groups could use to increase their knowledge and experience of the immense richness of Catholic Spirituality. The book is available from Pauline Books and we have a few at an introductory price of £5. Get in touch using the details overleaf. ✉

Faith and Technology

In November, Kathryn attended a conference of Adult Advisors from around the country. Fr Michael McCoy was one of the organising team who chose the theme of the place of technology in evangelisation and faith formation. The key speaker was Dr Ros Stuart Buttle.

Whilst everyone agreed that it is not a substitute for personal encounter, digital and other technologies do open up possibilities that were unheard of only a few years ago. Who could have imagined that we could so readily access Vatican documents—or keep in touch with family and friends in Australia through Skype? Or use great works of art to create reflective prayers using words and music? Or keep in touch with people through things such as Facebook and Twitter?

It is a tool that allows us to look at how we can re-present the truths of our Faith in ways that attract and encourage people to want to learn more.

Our diocesan website came in for much praise and the Night Prayer we created—using music and images based on the Prayer of the Church for Wednesday evenings—was a model of much we had talked about and made a beautiful end to the day. ✉

Diocesan Festival Inspire '15



Plans continue to unfold for next summer's Diocesan Festival which promises again to be a great opportunity for people around the Diocese to get together—to hear inspiring talks—and to spend time reflecting on how we might work together to help our faith to continue to flourish into the future.

Publicity and booking forms are in preparation and will be available in the New Year.

In the meantime, please make sure the dates are in your diary.

**Saturday 20—
Sunday 21 June 2015
Venue: Youth Village**

December: Putting Christ Back into Christmas

Advent is a contradictory time of the year for many of us. We get caught up in the preparations for Christmas—and this is often a source of great joy and fun. Sometimes, though, we end up as frazzled as everyone else and begin to wonder what it is all about.

We sometimes hear people say that we need to "put Christ back into Christmas". This can include things like sending religious Christmas cards—insisting on the religious Christmas stamps when we can—and making sure that we get to the various opportunities for prayer over the Advent season. It also means trying to keep Christmastime special too—not taking the decorations down as soon as the Boxing Day sales start!

St Teresa of Avila is quoted as saying that:

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours,

no hands but yours,

no feet but yours,

Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world.

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now."

Putting Christ back into Christmas

St Teresa of Avila said:

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours...
Over the next few weeks how might you live out being the Body of Christ in the world?"



Yours are the eyes

through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world.
Who needs your look of compassion this Advent and Christmastime?

Yours are the feet

with which he is to go about doing good.
Where will your feet take you this Advent and Christmastime?
And how will "do good" there?



Yours are the hands

with which he is to bless others now.
Who will you bless this Advent and Christmastime -
And how?

This might give us another take on putting Christ back into Christmas. If we are—as St Paul tells us—the Body of Christ then this is part of our mission...

being that Body—bringing the Christ within us into the situations we meet.

Our Prayer Station this month might help people to think about this over the next few weeks. You could even adapt it to for your parish newsletter... to encourage people to think about how they can help to bring Christ back into Christmas.

It could be as simple as making sure that our eyes are full of compassion and love for the hard-pressed shop assistant rather than irritation at having had to wait.

Or taking a (non-shopping) walk through the local shopping centre and focusing on praying for those who are harassed and who have lost the meaning of Christmas.

Or being generous in our donations or care for others.

And perhaps we can then try to keep it all up into the New Year! ✉