

The Pope's Intentions for December (please remember these in your personal prayer)

General: That our personal experience of suffering may be an occasion for better understanding the situation of unease and pain which is the lot of many people who are alone, sick, aged, and stir us all to give them generous help.

Missionary: That the peoples of the earth may open their doors to Christ and to His Gospel of peace, communion and justice.

Important Dates in 2011: The Bishop has informed us that Bishop Lagan will come to Greencastle for Confirmation on Wednesday 13th April (Fifth Week of Lent). Primary 4 pupils will make their First Confession on Friday 1st April and First Holy Communion on Sunday 5th June (The Feast of the Ascension).

Solemn Annual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (Forty Hours Devotion) 2011: Sunday 15th May in St. Patrick's Church, Greencastle and Sunday 21st August in Our Lady of the Wayside Church, Broughderg.

Parents Advice Centre – Helpline Volunteers: Men and women urgently required to train and work as Helpline volunteers. The preparation course is OCN accredited Level 2. For further information call (028) 7137 2006, call to the office City Factory Building, 100 Patrick Street or email marie@pachelp.org Parents Helpline Floor 2, City Factory Building, 100 Patrick Street, Derry BT48 7EL. Tel: (028) 7137 2006. parentsadvicecentre.org Parents Helpline Freephone: 0808 8010 722 Registered in N. Ireland No: N130087 Registered Office: Andras House, 60 Gt Victoria St, Belfast BT2 7BB A Charity: Inland Revenue No: X0492/80

Knock Marriage Introduction Bureau: The aim of the Bureau is to introduce people considering marriage to a suitable marriage partner. Over 800 marriages have taken place as a result of these introductions. If you are searching for a suitable partner, why not consider applying? For further information contact the Bureau at Knock, Co. Mayo. Phone 00353 94937 5960 or visit our website at www.knockmarriagebureau.com and read about the workings of the Bureau.

Foyle Hospice – Free Adult Counseling Service: Offered on Tuesdays to help support those with a life limiting illness and their families / carers. Counseling is also available for the bereaved and there is a children's bereavement support group. *For more info please contact the Hospice on (028) 7135 1010*

Family Care Society – Adoption: Could you make a child happy again after a difficult start in life? Family Care Society is presently seeking adoptive families who would be interested in parenting children aged between 3 and 8 years and who need the love and attention of a caring and understanding family. Could this be you? For more information contact Family Care Society on: (028) 9069 1133 (Belfast) or (028) 7136 8592 (Derry). email@familycaresociety.org www.familycaresociety.net

Foyle Camera Club Photographic Exhibition: Friday 17th December from 9.00am until 10.00pm and Saturday 18th December from 9.00am until 7.00pm on Debenhams Walkway/Bridge, Foyleside Shopping Centre. Photographs provided by members of Foyle Camera Club, all proceeds go to the Foyle Hospice.

The Holy Family Padre Pio prayer group – Monthly Meeting: Tuesday night 14th December in the Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, Derry instead of the usual Monday night due to the parish holding their Novena. The meeting will continue after the 7.15pm Mass. There will be two 1st class relics of St. Pio at the meeting. *All are welcome*

Tuesday's Child – Christmas Gala Ball: Tuesday's Child's Christmas Gala Ball is on Saturday 18th December in Belfast City Hall, hosted by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Pat Convery. The MC for the evening is Paul Clark from UTV and Sean Crummey is after-dinner speaker. Music is by Siobhán Pettit and her 9 piece swing band *Nightswing*. There is a pre-drinks reception with Christmas Carols by Louise Irvine and St. Malachy's Senior String Quartet and fabulous raffle prizes and auction items including some beautiful art pieces donated by artists north and south. Tickets are £60 and make an ideal Christmas gift, tables seat 10. All proceeds will go to Tuesday's Child projects for children living in extreme hardship in Gaza, India and Pakistan. We give 100% of proceeds.

For more info call (028) 9050 2725 or email info@tuesdayschild.org.uk or visit tuesdayschild.org.uk

This Week's Calendar of Feasts:

Sunday 12th December – St. Finnian (bishop) Studied in Idrone, Co. Carlow and later in Wales, on his return he settled in Clonard, Co. Meath around 520, where he established a famous school. His pupils, among which were Canice, Columcille and Brendan, were initiators of the great monastic expansion in Ireland. Died in 549 and is remembered as the tutor of all the saints of Ireland. *Feast not celebrated this year.*

Our Lady of Guadalupe Patron Saint of the Americas. This memorial recalls the apparitions in December, 1531 to Juan Diego Cuahtlatotzin on Tepeyac Hill, near Mexico City. Mary appeared as a symbol of wisdom and peace. Her image as a *mestiza*, a woman of native American and European heritage, remained in Juan's cloak (*tilma*). She appeared as "the little brown one," affectionately called La Morenita, who gives great dignity and holiness to the native and mestizo peoples of America. The tilma that Juan Diego presented to his doubtful bishop was filled with roses and is now enshrined in Mexico City in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Nowhere else does she appear as a pregnant woman as she does here, wearing the blue sash traditionally worn by expectant Aztec women. She also has a flower on her womb, an Aztec symbol of new life and a new era. Blocks the sun and stands on the moon. *Feast not celebrated this year.*

Monday 13th December – St. Lucy (virgin and martyr) Suffered much for her desire to remain consecrated to Christ alone. She was martyred in 304 in Sicily in the persecution of Diocletian. Her name means *light* and her intercession has been sought for eye trouble.

Tuesday 14th December – St. John of the Cross (priest and Doctor of the Church) [1542-1591] A Carmelite who, despite opposition and imprisonment, worked for the reform of the Carmelites. He was a man of prayer, an outstanding poet and a spiritual writer. Declared Doctor of the Church.

Saturday 18th December – St. Flanan (bishop) Lived during the 7th century and was the son of a king of Thomond. Entered Molua's monastery at Killaloe and became Abbot there. He is remembered as a great preacher.

Questions people ask:

- Q. I've struggled for years with an addiction. I keep on falling. Is there any hope for me?
- A. There is always hope for the simple reason that God's love for you never ceases, no matter how often you fall. God's help comes in many ways such as medical help, addiction counselling, prayer, pilgrimage to a holy place and especially through the understanding and support of fellow strugglers in an addiction fellowship. Advent is the season of hope. Come, Lord Jesus, into our desert areas and places of darkness.

Fr. Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap (silvesteroflynn@gmail.com)

The Deep End – Imprisonment:

What is always most striking about Advent is the liturgy's lack of reference to Christmas itself. My awareness of this may easily be a consequence of growing up in a time when Christmas became highly delineated by seasonal imagery, religious, commercial, religiously commercial and commercially religious. Either way, the image of John imprisoned is yet another telling reminder that Advent is more than preparing for turkey or, indeed, a sentimental manger scene. As we draw ever closer to Christmas, a noticeable thrust emerges from the liturgy of the word. Namely, the exasperated longing for God encapsulated in Isaiah's urge to hope, James' call to patience, and Jesus' request for faith.

John is impatient in his questioning. Fearful of dying without knowing, he sends his disciples to ask the young prophet about his intentions. Jesus urges them to believe and sends them on their way. But his response is no impatient dismissal; instead, it is full of the real emotion which is evident in the absence of friends. Just as John misses Jesus, so Jesus misses John. The Baptist is not imprisoned by the walls of a cell; rather, it is his sense of detachment from the coming which he has heralded that dominates his concern. Jesus' call to believe is the key which frees both us and John from our cells. Christ came to preach to those in prison. John, then, is closer to his esteemed rabbi than he knows. And it is most certainly the same for us who read. *Paul Clogher, Maynooth College*

Seeing your life through the lens of the gospels – Matthew 11:2-11:

1. In response to the question of John, Jesus let his actions speak for him. Some people show by the way they live what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Who has given you such an example? Perhaps there have been times when you have done the same for others.
2. John made a journey of faith from an incomplete knowledge of Jesus to a deeper understanding of who he was. Recall similar steps in your journey of faith.
3. Faith is not primarily about answering abstract theological questions but about living the gospel. What in your life has helped you to get that sense of perspective?
4. John marked the end of an era, Jesus the beginning of a new one. In our lives we are constantly been asked to respond to new challenges. We have to be able to let go, to move forward in hope and love into a new situation. How do we honour the past and yet be free to move on into a new experience?

John Byrne OSA (john@orlagh.ie)