



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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My dear friends and colleagues,

After “Depart in Peace” and the Blessing, anyone not used to the old form of the Mass would think it was all over. But not so.

In almost every Mass, the Last Gospel is then read. And, of course, usually the *Last Gospel* consists of the *First Words* of the Gospel according to St John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is what John thought was the best introduction to the Good News he was about to tell.



From the Archdeacon's desk

The first sentences are heavenly, cosmic, set in the mystery of Creation. The Word is the creator of all things; He is Life and Light for all mankind; the primeval darkness is conquered by His Light.

And then we zoom down to earth. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” That is indeed a sudden descent back down to the here and now – a sudden change of tack! But then St John the Evangelist has to make clear to his readers that this John (the Baptist) was not the Light he was talking about, but a witness to that Light. And the Greek word for witness was *martyrion*, and every one of his original readers would be aware of the awful fate of John the Baptist as the first Martyr, or Witness, to Jesus.

But John goes on to make the vast claim that Jesus was “the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world”. *Every* person – not just the Jews, but *every nation* was given light by the Word of God. St Paul says the same when he says that every person knows good through the natural law. Jesus was “in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not”.

The Evangelist follows that by saying that those who did receive Him, those who recognised their Maker and Redeemer, were given power. Their batteries were charged so that they had the divine energy of God, to become not *slaves* of God, not even *friends* of God, but *children* of God, entirely through God’s free gift. A possibility for everyone!

Finally comes the most wonderful sentence of all, when all the talk about the Word, the Logos, the great creative energy of God, says what no Greek or Hebrew philosophy had ever said: “THE WORD BECAME FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US.” That is when we fall to our knees (genuflect) in adoration, just as John himself had done with his brother James and their friend Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration. There (and in each Mass) “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”.

What more can the Congregation say than “Thanks be to God”? Then we go out into the world He made, hopefully trailing some of that glory with us.

With every blessing for a happy Christmas and a healthy new year.

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Christmas – Balancing the books?

“ ‘A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!’ cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach. ‘Bah!’ said Scrooge. ‘Humbug.’

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge’s, that he was all in a glow: his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

‘Christmas a humbug, Uncle!’ said Scrooge’s nephew. ‘You don’t mean that I’m sure?’ ‘I do’ said Scrooge. ‘Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.’

‘Come then’ returned the nephew gaily. ‘What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.’

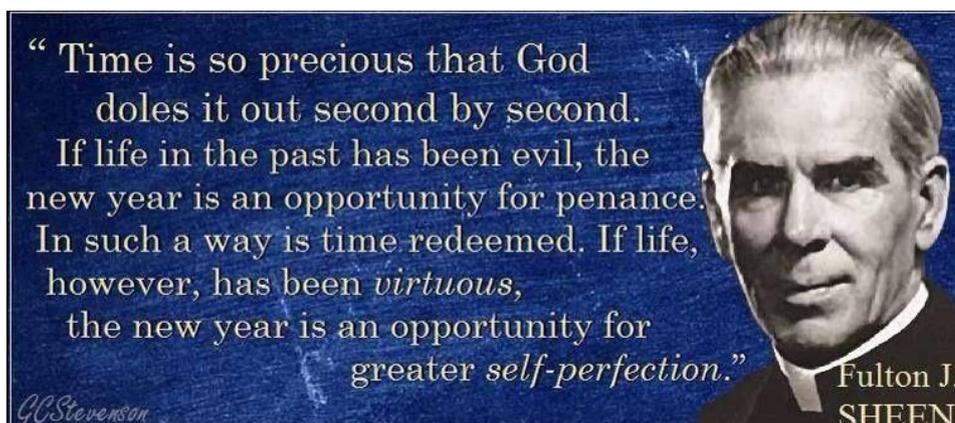
Scrooge, having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment said ‘Bah!’ again; and followed it up with ‘Humbug!’

‘Don’t be cross, Uncle!’ said the nephew.

‘What else can I be’ returned the Uncle, ‘when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon Merry Christmas! What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money: a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer: a time for balancing your books and having every item in ’em through a round dozen months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,’ said Scrooge indignantly ‘Every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.’” – *Charles Dickens “A Christmas Carol”*

In one respect Scrooge is right: Christmas is a time for balancing the books – but morally and spiritually rather than financially. A time for acknowledging every item, however hidden; admitting to every expenditure however secret; facing up to the difference between the image of ourselves we would like others to see and the image of God we were created in, witnessing our Christmas, past, present, and future, face to face. For the message the angels bring is that even though the numbers don’t balance, God and sinners are reconciled, as Charles Wesley wrote in “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”, in a true reconciliation which brings everything to light in order to bring true and complete healing and wholeness.

Peace on earth – good will towards all. That is, good will and grace overflowing from God to each one of us for no other reason than we need it, and God loves us.



(My “desk picture” shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)