



Dear Friends,

It is not long now until we hear St. John the Baptist exhorting us to “repent – prepare the way of the Lord – make straight his paths.”

The Scriptures of Advent invite us to repair, to straighten and to restore a way for Christ to come again into our world. They are powerful images and it is in our hands to smooth the coming of God’s reign of justice and peace.

It is for us to prepare a way for God’s people, so that they can be freed from whatever oppresses them and help them reach a place of peace and plenty.

Advent calls us into the mystery of our deeper lives in Christ. Advent reminds us that Christ comes into our world today through us – we are the hands, the eyes, the compassion of Christ reaching out to touch the world. We are the healers, the liberators, the presence of God here among His people.

We have seen the tens of thousands of men, women and children who today are walking a twisted and rough pathway – a pathway of suffering, of violence and powerlessness brought on by the never-ending conflicts in the countries of their birth. What is my attitude to welcoming these deprived and exploited refugees to our land of plenty? What would St. Francis say to us today, as we watch the forced migration of millions in search of peace and a better life?

I read where Christmas is the time of year when our hearts should reach out and hold the hopes and hungers, the dreams and the needs of all the human race – hold each and every one in the embrace of our love. Christmas is the time of year when we join hands with our brothers and sisters and hope that as healers – as liberators – we will enlarge that circle of love and create a world at peace.

- Sr. Liz



Basilica of St Clare

The Basilica was designed by the Franciscan Friar, Filippo di Campello (1255-65). The Church was actually an extension of the ancient chapel of St George (which remained in the interior of the Basilica.) It was here that Francis received his very first lessons from the Priests, and where he was later buried. (His body was reburied in the present Basilica of St Francis.) The body of St Clare is buried here.

Recently, the church of St George has been restored to its original dimensions. Behind a modern grille there are relics of Clare and Francis on display – a lock of Clare’s hair cut by St Francis, a shirt embroidered by her and tunics worn by the two saints.

The body of Clare was discovered in 1850, in the middle of the rock underneath the main altar. It was declared to be incorrupt and was displayed in a glass case for the veneration of her followers. However, with



Basilica of St Clare in Assisi

time there was a deterioration of her body, especially her face, so it was taken away for a period of time. When it was returned, one could see that her face was protected by a layer of wax. The plaque telling pilgrims Clare's body was incorrupt, has now been taken down.

To the right is the Chapel where one can pray before the Byzantine Crucifix which spoke to St Francis in San Damiano. A moving experience is to sit in the Basilica and listen to the cloistered Sisters of St Clare chanting their morning and evening Office.

An interesting fact about the Basilica is that the pointed Belltower is the highest in Assisi. Inside the Basilica are buried the bodies of St Agnes and the Blessed Ortolana who are respectively the sister and mother of Clare.

Jubilees

Sr Mary Quentin

Sr Mary Quentin was born in England of Irish parents. As a young girl she felt a strong calling to be a missionary and serve on the foreign missions. She entered our Order in Ireland where she began her Novitiate training. Three years later she left for Australia.

In 1949, our sisters went to PNG at the invitation of the Franciscan Friars to work in the Aitape Diocese, working mainly in the fields of health and education, especially

*We have been called to heal wounds,
to unite what has fallen apart,
and to bring home
those who have lost their way.*

- St Francis

with the women.

Our Quentin longed to go with them, but it was to be another 12 long years before her dream could be realized. When the joyous news finally arrived that she was to be sent to PNG, Quentin packed her bags in haste. Without a backward glance, she left the familiar surroundings of Brisbane to face whatever the good Lord had prepared for her on the mission fields.

Quentin arrived in Fatima in 1958 and began teaching. For the next few years her time was divided between Fatima in the mountains and Sissano on the coast, doing what she loved so much – teaching children and visiting the families in the village. During her years in Fatima, she walked to Karate village each weekend to spend time with the people. Sitting by the fire in the evening, she shared stories with the villagers, as well as listening to theirs, giving selflessly of her time.



Sr Mary Quentin

In 1969, Quentin was asked to be part of the Pastoral Outreach that visited our mission on the Sepik River. Every month Quentin would journey with a Friar. Here she would spend time with the catechist, helping with instructions in Religion, especially in the local school. (A wonderful account of this is included in her book *The Ride of my Life*, first published in March, 2007.)

While working with Sr Therese Magee at St Martin's Pastoral Centre in Aitape, she managed two apostolates with her usual gentleness and good humour. During this time at St Martin's, Therese died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage – she was only 62. Quentin faced this cross with her usual strength, born of prayer.

Quentin left PNG in 1992 and returned to Australia. Here she continued to give generously of herself in places such as Rockhampton, (Queensland), Fitzroy Crossing (Western Australia), Pottsville (New South Wales) and Kedron, where she now resides, her listening ear ever ready to tune in to others. At 93, she welcomes each day with joy and gratitude to God for the privilege she was given to work in His vineyard on the foreign mission fields of PNG.

Sr Mary Francois

My mother's sister and brother were among the original Columbans, and their letters home from their mission in China had a big influence on my missionary vocation.

Like Sr Mary Quentin, I grew up with a great desire to serve God on the foreign missions. Many of my friends had entered the convent, but somehow I didn't feel the call to enter any of these Congregations. While doing Mothercraft training at Broadmeadows, one of the Sisters of St. Joseph told me of a missionary Order in PNG where she sent food parcels from time to time. I made enquiries and found they were the Mfic's with their Provincial House in Brisbane. I learnt four sisters had recently left to open a mission in Sissano on the north coast of PNG. I knew then that God was calling me there, so I made arrangements to enter the Novitiate in Kedron.

At the end of my Novitiate training, I was thrilled to find myself missioned to PNG – God is so good! On arrival, I found our schools were very big – they not only catered for the local children, but for boarders as well. Those who were boarders

came from parishes far away. Ours was the only school in the area, so our classes were extra large.

I also spent 10 wonderful years doing Maternal Health Patrols. My means of transport were varied – sometimes I went on horseback, sometimes I went on foot and at other times it was the motorbike or the four-wheel drive! How I enjoyed my time with the village women, working and ministering in places such as Sissano, Ulau, Aitape, Lemieng and Lumi. Apart from teaching and nursing, I was also Family Life Co-Ordinator and Diocesan Health Secretary. At that time, the death rate of mothers and their newly born was alarming, so you can imagine the joy when we finally had a hospital in Sissano. What a blessing it was for mothers who could now deliver their offspring in safety, surrounded by care and medical assistance. The pressure was lifted from our sisters who often had to do the work of a Doctor in difficult cases.



Sr Mary Francois

I was also grateful to God when we opened a House of Refuge in the Wewak Diocese for deserted and battered women and children, victims of domestic violence. Here these suffering women found a haven of peace and safety. Each day I thank God for the opportunity He gave me to minister for fifty-five years to the wonderful people of PNG – a ministry that for me was so fulfilling and enriching.

To look at the seed in the seemingly empty days before it breaks open, one would think absolutely nothing is happening. When we open our heart in love to God, we are like the seed, waiting for our spiritual germination.

- Joyce Rupp

St Columban's 1400th anniversary

Fourteen hundred years ago on 23rd November 615, a great Irishman, St Columban, died in Bobbio, Italy. He was born in Leinster on the Carlow-Wexford border. The Irish at this time had a communal way of living, so when he decided to become a monk, he sacrificed family life as well as worldly pleasures and the status he would have enjoyed among his peers.

In the 6th Century, monasteries were the great centres of learning. It was from these monasteries that the monks set out to spread the teachings of Jesus across Europe. Columban was the most influential of this missionary movement. He was certainly a man of great faith and courage, for in his day people usually lived and died in the place of their birth – it is said they rarely travelled more than 10 kilometres from home.



Not St Columban – he was one of the most travelled men of his time, crossing and recrossing at least five countries of mainland Europe, establishing monasteries wherever he went. These monasteries were certainly a challenge – the monks had long hours of prayer during the day and the night and the monastic life was marked by discipline, austerity and silence. They ate only one meal (normally vegetarian) a day – it was eaten mainly in the early afternoon. The monks at times also spent days in prayer in the forest or in a cave – always alone during this period of contemplation.

When reading his life, I was struck by his love and care for God's creation, so like our own dear Francis of Assisi. In his sermon on grace, Columban is quoted as saying - "those who wish to know the great depth of God, must first learn about creation."

On another occasion he reminded the monks - "If you wish to know the Creator, learn about creatures."

Like other great Irish saints, finding God in creation came naturally to Columban. Many legends grew up around the saint. It is recorded that doves played in the fold of his cowl and that birds approached him and nestled in the palms of his hands, and even wild beasts obeyed his commands.

There was an occasion when the saint was walking and praying, he was confronted by a pack of savage wolves. (Remember the story of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio?) He prayed earnestly for God's help. The wolves approached, touched his Habit and wandered off, doing Columban no harm. He and his monks certainly found God in the world around them.

Let us ask Columban on this great anniversary for the gift of faith and the zeal and courage to be fervent evangelists for the Lord. His feast day is November 23rd.

In conclusion

As we prepare to celebrate the great feast of Christmas, may we share in

*The song of the angels,
the wonder of the shepherds,
the worship of the three wise men
and the excitement of the young.*

May our joys and sorrows, gains and losses become gifts to others, and help to make us more compassionate to all those we meet.

Sending you all joy-filled Christmas Blessings full of love.

- Sr. Liz

