



Parish Priest: Rev. Mgr. John M Walsh

Parish: Our Lady of Compassion

Tel No: 07104 873230

Email: ourladyofcompassionformby@rcaol.org.uk

Web: ourladyofcompassionformby.org.uk

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Dear Friends

NEW YEAR MESSAGE – 2022

Let me begin by wishing everyone in our Formby Catholic community a very happy and blessed 2022! I am sure that very few of us will be sorry to see 2021 behind us. Covid continued to overshadow every aspect of our lives. As we enter the third calendar year of the pandemic, the virus still retains the upper hand. Pope Francis in his New Year message has acknowledged that 'we are still living in uncertain and difficult times due to the pandemic' and that 'many are frightened about the future'. It is important that we acknowledge and face the fear and uncertainty of this present moment. By doing so, we are not being fatalistic or doom-laden. Just honest. It is the seemingly never ending path of this virus that gets us down. Just as we glimpse the end of the path, another variant emerges and we seem to be back to square one. So, is this the best we can hope for?

Pope Francis points out a new path for us, a new perspective. He suggests that as the new year begins we should focus on the good. On first reading, it does not sound particularly earth shattering. Perhaps we might like something a little more dramatic. But let's stay with it for a moment. The very fact that it sounds like quite a mundane idea invites us to look a little closer. The more I stayed with this suggestion, the more it made sense. I began by realising that the dark and hopeless world view that the media saturates us with affects us far more deeply than we might realise. Let's be honest. The media is not just interested in communicating news. It is far more interested in forming a world view, particular ideas and values. Not all of these are bad or negative of course. But gradually, over time, don't you feel that the light and the energy is being drained from you? That in a very real way, bad news, and a gloomy outlook become the place where we settle. It is actually, incredibly, the place we begin to feel more comfortable!

Enter Pope Francis. We are all fully aware of the consequences of this pandemic. Each one of us has lived with it for almost two years! But with his unique world view and his closeness to God, the Pope sees another way. Focus on the good. This is not just therapy. We are being asked to begin to shift our world view, to refocus it. One might say, to open our eyes fully.

So where is the good? Let us just take a moment to open our eyes. If we have reasonable good health, have enough to eat, are able to keep warm. Let us begin there when so many are deprived of



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even these basics. If we are loved, if we are able to show love, if we have been able to reach out to those in need and offer our time to others. If we have received vaccines and been given some protection against the virus. If I have a roof over my head when so many are cold and homeless, if I am called or messaged by a friend, remembered and thought about. The list could go on.

There is good around us. What about the good within? It shouldn't surprise us that many suffer from poor self esteem, a sense of little worth. These are complex realities in the lives of us all. But they quickly prevent us from seeing what God sees; the good within, created and loved by Him. Even this simple truth is incomprehensible to many. Who could possibly love me? If people knew what I was really like!

It is time to pause and reflect at the gateway of the new year. We are not simply members of a particular parish in a particular place. We are God's children. We carry the light. We are loved and cherished. Glimpse that, and the good around us becomes visible very quickly. Ignore the good within, refuse to believe it, and the only companions left are cynicism, negativity and a critical personality. Are these the companions we want?

Our greatest, highest and most perfect good is God, of course. As people of faith we know this. Whether we really believe it is another matter! He is the source of all that is good. All light, joy and peace. When Pope Francis invites us to focus on the good, it is this that he ultimately means. Follow the trail of the good within you and around you. It only leads to one place. To its source. To our Father God.

This new year, let us find the courage to begin again. On reading this you may think; it's too late, habits are formed, things are too far gone. The opportunity to change has passed me by. Once those words have passed through our ears, then wait for a moment. There is another voice speaking very different words. 'You cannot, but I can!'. Of course this is beyond us if left to our own poor strength. But the One who dwells in light invites us to be still and to simply open our hearts to that light. That is enough. The light brings its own warmth, illumination and healing. That is how we begin. Not by ourselves, alone. But with Him.

He invites us to take small steps. To see and seek the good in everything and everyone. In our conversations with each other to counter bad news with good, criticism with praise, despair with hope.



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To make the decision to live in God's light which gives us strength, to remain in that light and to avoid those moments when we are drawn back into the dark, into those things that make us unhappy. This is the path that Pope Francis points out to us. The path of Jesus Christ. I can think of no better way to begin this new year.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

Father John



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