

Looking back at 2021 through its seasons of faith

A Year of Hope

When looking back on 2021, we remember a year of many challenges. With Covid-19, travel restrictions have placed enormous stresses on families and the turmoil of isolation or absence from family members has come at an emotional and financial cost. At times, many have felt hopeless and any hope for a better future seemed to have quickly diminished. The current discussion to vaccinate or not vaccinate has been another source of anguish for some, and a celebration for others.



Pope Francis (2021) recently released a statement stating that, “Thanks to God’s grace and to the work of many, we now have vaccines to protect us from Covid-19,” and that these vaccines, “bring hope to end the pandemic, but only if they are available to all and if we collaborate with one another” in solidarity. He also added that, “getting vaccinated is a simple yet profound way to care for one another, especially the most vulnerable.” It is our act of love for ourselves and others.

Just six weeks ago we started a new Church Year. And, in spite of the rush and business most of us experienced over the last month or so, we managed to be still and wait for the Saviour through Advent, rejoice at his birth on Christmas and stand in awe at his Epiphany just two weeks back. All this has given us a fresh start. One could call it a reset. It is a time to return to Jesus and embrace what his message has to offer. In Pope Francis’ letter to the world, *Fratelli Tutti*, the pope picks up on Jesus’ teachings of love for others and embodies it when he goes on to say: “Love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure ... of mutual belonging” (2020, No. 95). Even in times of unrest and fear, Advent, Christmas and Epiphany remind Catholics that our future is in loving others. Our duty to care for the marginalised, the oppressed, the hungry and the poor is our responsibility as Catholics.

John O’Donahue articulates this idea of love for humankind so eloquently, stating that, “love is absolutely vital for human life”. St John’s message is that, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (Jn. 4:16) offers a mantra by which to live. In Proverbs, we are reminded that, “hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs” (Prov. 10:12).

In Advent, we lit the four candles that represent hope, faith, joy, and peace; at Christmas we received the Light of Christ into our everyday world and on Epiphany we saw his glory revealed firstly to the Magi and now to us. Covid-19 has instilled fear and trauma for some. At the same time everything we have celebrated in recent weeks points to a time of healing. Rather than living only in fear, perhaps we could look for the blessings that have enriched our lives. In turn, these same blessings become the light that guides us into 2022. Happy New Year!

