

Sunday within the Octave of Christmas – Feast of the Holy Family

Dear Parishioners,

This week I discovered that I am an unwitting follower of a new fashion. At the end of the Advent Course, where we focused some of our attention on the visual representations of the three great Christmas mysteries we explored, I suggested we display our Christmas cards prominently in our homes so that, as we passed by our provisional art gallery during these hectic days, we might cast more than a passing glance at one of the cards, and choose a favourite to accompany us across the twelve days. Practise what you preach, Father! I took particular trouble this year to have clusters of cards in various parts of the presbytery: on a bookcase in the landing, on the dresser in the dining room, on the mantelpiece in the drawing room most of you know well, and still there were cards claiming attention. So, I decided I would use the coffee table – a long, sturdy, low-lying piece of furniture – at eye level when I or guests are seated on the sofa. Sipping a cup of coffee I had Guido Reni, Paolo Veronese, the Flemish painter Adrian van Orlei, an Irish painter active in the first part of the 20th century called Mainie Jellet (1897 – 1944) and our own parishioner Evie Porter whose delightful, skilful and colourful depiction of the Virgin and Child continues to charm – and amaze me – over this Christmas period, within my sights.

You have wandered from the point you may say. One of my closest friends came to visit me on the third day of Christmas, spotted the laden coffee table, and informed me that this year lots of people of taste and discretion were standing their cards up on their tables, be they low coffee tables such as the one I used, dining room tables once the dishes were cleared, or desks cleared of papers and office necessities. I was pleased to be following a new seasonal fashion in the way I was displaying my cards but reflected that, not only are the images so important in feeding my imagination across the twelve days, but they are an encouraging reminder that so many people, Catholic, Christian, and without particular religious affiliation, make a conscious effort to buy and select cards which not only lift the mind to *higher things* but support charities which year round support and help people in need. Many of the charities whose cards we buy and send are active in making life bearable for poor people, people on the move or those living long-term in refugee camps, not more than a day's journey – not more than that journey made by Mary to visit her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judah, and much shorter than the road followed by the wise men – from where Jesus of Nazareth was born and lived.

It is good to reflect on the multiple beneficial effects of a card sent at Christmas: it assures friends and family of abiding love and friendship, it affords us the grace of giving and bringing pleasure to others, it *evangelises* through exposure to the great art inspired by the story, and in being sold in aid of a charity – not least one doing good work in the Middle East, in Palestine and in the Holy Land – it is an expression of love, as Jesus would have wanted us to share.

Father Patrick