

## Christmas Night/Day & Holy Family

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

This is the most unusual Christmas the majority of us has ever lived through. We have had to abandon many of our cherished traditions: parish Christmas parties, carol services, Nativity plays, door-to-door carol singing for charitable causes and – for many of you this is particularly painful – Christmas dinner, the distribution of gifts under the tree, and the gathering of families in the greatest manifestation of cross-generational solidarity of the year. Some traditions have survived the pandemic: the postman continues to deliver Christmas cards, emails pour in and there are those annual telephone calls. Thank God. Other more important traditions too – and I hold my breath as I am the only parish in the Birmingham Diocese in Tier 4, and there is yet another emergency press conference looming – such as Midnight Mass and the Masses of Christmas Day are still on the schedule.

This is not the only time in the history of the Catholic Church that cherished traditions were abandoned or abolished, often with cynical disregard for the feelings of faithful believers and clergy too. The years which followed Vatican II were experienced by many as witnessing an assault on so many of the traditions we loved: the complex liturgies of the Tridentine Rite, Rosary & Benediction and countless novenas, the wonderful headdresses of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and, for those of us whose childhoods were in Ireland, the headdresses and veils of the Sisters of St. Louis and Sisters of Mercy. Every Catholic of a certain age will have his or her cherished tradition the disappearance of which we still mourn.

But with a perspective of half a century we realise that as old traditions disappear, new usages are born. And often they make a lot more sense. The scripture readings in the vernacular, the communal singing at Mass and the clergy being knocked off their pedestals have been no bad thing! The pandemic has come as a shock but we very quickly realised that what we had always taken completely for granted could disappear just as quickly. Maybe this Christmas, with fewer parties, fewer hectic journeys to see family and friends, fewer elaborate meals, we can devote that little bit more attention to the Christmas story itself and lavish extra attention on those who are in our “bubble.” Maybe we can linger on our Christmas cards and reflect on the message about the Nativity the artist sought to convey. Or maybe we can tap into that incredible gulf of good will that is abroad in our streets and neighbourhoods thanks to the pandemic, and ourselves make Christmas that little bit extra special for people we heretofore took for granted or neglected. So, as traditions disappear new ones are born even to the degree of making our celebration of Christmas that more authentic.

**Nollag Shona! Sainte fête de Noël! Fröhe Weihnachten! Buon Natale! Zalig Kerstmis!**

**A HAPPY & BLESSED CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!**