

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Aberdeen

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St Mary's, Inverness

The Feast of The Holy Family of Jesus,
Mary & Joseph

Sunday 29 December 2019

Dear Friends,

Welcome ! As we gather to celebrate the Feast we are conscious of our family life together as Catholics. Wherever we come from, whoever we are, Catholics know deep in our hearts that we are a family of families, knit together in faith, with our Holy Father, Pope Francis and all the Bishops, priests and people of the Universal Church. Thanks be to God for the cords of affection that bring us together to worship God-with-us [Emmanuel]- to share in the life affirming love of the Holy Family. It is good to be here, knowing that we are supported in Christ Jesus, by the prayers of St Joseph and Our Lady, Mary. Today we pray with sincere hearts for our own families, for the Church family and for those friends who worship with us, and for others who have a call on our prayers.

Praise and prayer, love and friendship, these have blessed us over the Christmas period : what magnificent Masses, so much joy in the large congregations at every Mass. Wherever, at the Midnight Mass here, at the Mass of the Dawn in the Prison, in the Masses of Christmas Day the sense of the Presence of God was real and palpable. How is this?

So many things contribute to the ambience, to the sense of the holy, to the true and living vibrancy of sincere hearts and the songs of praise. It is for this many cultured, much varied, and utterly generous gifted-ness that we thank God. It is you, dear friends, the worshippers, the sacristans, the servers, the musicians, the flower arrangers, the bakers and tea-makers, the Pass-keepers and everyone who comes to kneel and pray. You make us what we are - a people of God, ardent, desiring to share our treasures old and new. The beauty of our Church is a many splendored thing - Word and Sacrament so often expressed in Music and Art.

Today our Bishop, Hugh Gilbert OSB, will dedicate a new Sculpture depicting St Magnus the Martyr. A poem by Gilbert Markus, was the inspiration for the sculpture by Leonie Gibbs. "I have no

quarrel with anyone here- show us your path of peace, Bright Magnus, pray for us'. In our world of violence and ghastly strife, St Magnus, a layman, the Norse Earl of Orkney is perhaps a model, an exemplar for us - praying for peace, even submitting to death to end a fratricidal and dynastic war, pardoning his executioner. His Christ-like devotion has made him something of a cult in these northern parts- his nine-hundredth anniversary in 2017 was well attended, and you may recall some of it. I was enchanted by the beauty of the Mass in Orkney Cathedral, and the story of Magnus, that it seemed appropriate that the only martyr of the Deanery of the Highlands should have a focus in our Church. It is a reminder that even in the celebrations of the Nativity, which lie behind the crass and tinsel razzmatazz of our secular Christmas, there is the knowledge that what was begun in a Crib ends on a Cross. Yet even on the Cross, there are signs of peace, and of Reconciliation : Forgive! This is the heart of the Gospel of Jesus : God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Also within the family context of the Mass today, one of our own number, in many ways our 'paterfamilias', Bryan Longmore,

will be invested with a Papal award, the Knighthood of St Gregory, by our Bishop. The Holy Father has recognized in Bryan a lifetime's Catholic witness in so many ways within our Highland community. You will recognise him when you see him, but if you need another look you will find a portrait of Bryan Longmore hanging in the Town House presented by a grateful Burgh to honour this senior Lawyer whose Learning and wisdom is widely respected. Bryan has had many distinctions in his time, perhaps foremost, representing the Queen as a Deputy Lieutenant of Inverness-shire.

Most of us know that Bryan, with his late, and dearly loved wife, Leonella, was involved with the life of the town and county. From being active in the Inverness Italian Circle, supporting the work of L'Arche, promoting Heritage issues in the city, and being a leading player in the Civic Trust Bryan has brought quiet dignity and exemplary commitment to a range of social and cultural issues. Within our own parish Bryan has been as assiduous and helpful member of the Fabric and Finance Committee, and occasionally being the promoter of Financial Appeals. He has been the spokesman for several Parish Priests,

and he has made several of us welcome, and seen us off with amusing valedictions.

We are all grateful today that Bishop Hugh has come from far-flung Aberdeen, to celebrate with us, dedicating Bright Magnus, investing our gentle knight, Bryan. It is particularly generous of our Bishop as he has had a very busy few weeks, and in a couple of days is flying to Vietnam, praying for vocations to the priesthood.

We are much blessed in our vocations, and it is good to be able to welcome our own dear Christopher Doig, a Diocesan Seminarian in Rome.

There is much yet to do: to recover the lapsed, to reconcile sinners, and to discover the lost, and to celebrate with each other at the Table of the Lord.

I take this opportunity of thanking you all for your generous hearts and many kindnesses to all the priests. We appreciate all that you do. Thanks be to God.

With every good wish for the remainder of Christmass-tide and every Prayer and Blessing for the New Year.

Fr James