



Dear Friends

The Angels announced peace on earth at the birth of Jesus. As we write we are painfully reminded that tragically we still haven't learned what Jesus asked of us – love one another as I have loved you. The Holy Land is again being wracked by war, as all the other wars continue across the globe. There have been so many natural disasters around the world this year, earthquakes, floods, droughts, fires etc. So many are left suffering. We could ask “where is God in all this”. Our faith tells us that God is in all this, He is with us at all times still loving us and we are sure hoping

that someday we will learn.

At Epiphany tide this year we reflected on the three Kings / Magi / Wise men. They followed the star to find the Lord Jesus. Well, you can't see the stars during the day so these three must have travelled by night. A dangerous journey surely. They might have gone off course, a camel might have fallen down a hole, or they might have met a nasty creature – four legged or two or no legs at all..... Lots of mights.

Isn't that just what life is about. There is an element of risk in all our lives and we too travel in the dark not knowing what the future will bring. God sent His Son Jesus into the world that He be our light, our guide, our salvation. All through the bible He tells us “do not be afraid, I am with you”. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. It is Jesus happy birthday.

Our year has been busy and full. As part of our Advent preparation for Christmas we joined our Oxford Carmelite Fathers via Zoom for their Advent retreat / reflections. The Advent liturgy is very beautiful and we have some Advent devotions which help us to keep focused on the real meaning of Christmas and what we are celebrating. For us it is a beautiful time of year as well as a busy one. In January three of our Sisters finished the formators course run by the Association of Irish Carmels. Five of our Sisters from England also took part.

As winter turned to spring we were delighted to see all the flowers and colour come back to the garden, every turn revealed something else and lifted the heart in praise to God. The celebration of consecrated life on 2nd February was postponed till the 25th March and this year was held in the Church of the Holy Cross Dundrum. Some of our Sisters attended the celebration and the goodies afterwards provided by the good ladies of the parish.

We had our Easter Triduum and Vigil for the first time since covid and it was certainly a joy for us all. We attended the Triduum and Vigil via webcam during covid and while it was uplifting and we appreciated being able to attend, it is not the same as being physically present, so we really felt privileged to have it this year.

In May two of our Sisters attended the contemplative ongoing formation meeting at Mullaghmore in Co Sligo. This year the topic was synodality. Bishop Ger Nash of Ferns and Fr Gerard O'Hanlon SJ gave the talks and the sisters came back full of enthusiasm and encouragement that we are already living synodality in Community. We do this by our journeying together and listening to all who come our way. The conference was held in the Star of the Sea Retreat and Conference Centre which is situated on a magnificent peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic. The views are spectacular and the ocean invigorating. A great place to contemplate the works of the Lord. Situated in Yeats country and 2023 being the centenary of William Butler Yeats receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Sisters couldn't fail to visit his grave in Drumcliffe on their way. Seeing the beauty of the place one can understand that it is a poet's paradise.

It was a wet Summer but we managed to have dinner in the garden regularly and to watch the butterflies and bees and all else that landed go about their daily tasks of enhancing our world.

For the World youth day two of our Sisters attended the Mass and blessing of the pilgrims at

Dublin airport before they set out for Lisbon. An enthusiastic young bunch happy to share their faith in Jesus.

Our retreat this year was given by Fr Aelred Mc Gee OCSO from Portglenone Abbey. It was very enriching to have input from a different perspective of the contemplative life. All the Sisters felt renewed and uplifted by it.

Following soon after we had our Carmelite ongoing formation meeting in Dunardagh with Fr Matt Blake OCD. This year's topic was St John of the Cross's Spiritual Canticle. As always Fr Matt gave us much to reflect on and a renewed wish to delve deeper into the works of St John of the Cross.

During the year we have had the pleasure of attending Jubilees and Professions in Malahide and Tallow Carmels and the Redemptoristines. Our congratulations to the jubilarians and to our Sisters who made their First and Final vows. Thank God there are more to come in the coming year.

This year we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of St Therese of Lisieux – the Little Flower – and in 2025 we will celebrate the centenary of her canonization. We are reflecting on her writings using the study guides provided by the Carmelite Generalate House in Rome. (www.carmelitaniscalzi.com – go to Documents and then to Reading and reflections.)

We had to pause our study days as we prepared our submission on the renewal of our Constitutions. There will be various stages in this task as we are a worldwide Order and all our different cultures and geographical experiences of living Carmelite life will be explored.

Our pet friends keep us entertained. Súile our dog likes being a one and only and demands lots of attention. She makes sure we all get our walk in the grounds every day.

Our cats, Tuppence and Abby are on patrol to make sure nothing unwelcome comes on their patch.

The family at the lodge have a young cat and he sensibly turns this way instead of heading for the road when he leaves the comfort of his bed and the company of his loving children. He entertains us when he arrives, as Abby insists, she is the matriarch and he arches his back and hisses that he is King. He has Súile under his control. There is plenty of room in the fields for all of them. In the Spring our buzzard was heard mewing like a cat while in flight and we discovered that Ella had arrived. She stayed around for a couple of weeks and then the two took off for a while to nest and rear we hope some chicks. George is back home and has been joined by another buzzard. We no longer know which one is which as both are equally tame and will happily sit on a low branch or fence as we approach.

Harry and Henrietta, the herons have been put off by the electric fence each side of the stream and haven't ventured too close to save their wings. However, where there is a will there is a way and Buí the white egret lands on a branch overhanging the stream to get into position before dropping down for a feed. One afternoon during the Summer an unusual bird was noticed at the bird feeder. A quick look in the bird book confirmed that it was a woodpecker. We have since learned that he has been seen in U.C.D. grounds since January.

At the moment our donkeys Seolta and Glen are rejoicing that the cattle have gone home and they have free run of the fields. Seolta has mastered the art of breaking out and has trained Glen to do likewise so now we are not alerted to Seolta's escape by Glen's braying when left behind and we can find them anywhere on the grounds! They find the flies and particularly the midges troublesome and when we don't arrive in time to take them to their house they find their own way out and around the Monastery to their own shelter where the flies do not enter.

In early spring we discovered lots of butterflies on a patch of nettles in the field and we had lots of them all summer. Result being no cutting of nettles to tidy up the fields!!

We had a lot of lady birds hibernating in the velux windows but sadly many didn't make it through the winter.

We have had many requests for prayers through email, letters and people coming to visit. We hold all of you in our prayers and ask God to grant all your needs.

We wish you all the blessings of the coming season, and may you know the comfort and consolation of the presence of the Word made flesh Jesus the Son of God and His Blessed Mother Mary now and in the coming year.

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