

Image of the day - Durham Cathedral

We must plan for a better society, Archbishop McDowell

The Most Revd John McDowell, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, has written in yesterday's Irish Times on the potential way ahead for society beyond the current pandemic -

Government files under embargo have been opened and people are no doubt looking back, as we do every year, with that customary range of reaction to the political past, running from "I told you so" to "Can you believe it?"

Pity the politicians who had neither foresight nor infallibility, but who had to make decisions in the moment. Perhaps in



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this year of all years we might also look towards 2021 with much the same feelings, adding only: “Where on earth do we begin?”

There are some signs of hope in relation to getting ahead of coronavirus, but probably a Slough of Despond to wade through first.

We will begin to see for real what the effects of Brexit will be on ordinary life on these islands, and for relationships within and between them. On top of that, we have the anniversary of the foundation of Northern Ireland to look forward to, which, no doubt, will be marked/celebrated/analysed/ignored/vituperated, depending on one's perspective.

Not to forget that, as David McWilliams puts it, our countries owe a shedload of money (to whom we're not quite sure) but we're in for pretty constant reminders that it is owed, I wonder will anyone volunteer to take on a bit more than their “fair share” of that burden? Well maybe there are some people who should, and I'm one of them.

Those of us who have lived through a period of rising prosperity for the past 20 and more years, a banking crisis notwithstanding. Our pension pots might not be as good as we had hoped but we'll not be eating crusts by the roadside.

Perhaps it's worth suggesting a few groups of people who might be uppermost in the minds of politicians and policymakers, as they plot a way forward on behalf of all of us towards a compassionate society that is a bit more than simply “fair”.



There are the groups of relative newcomers to this island, who now live here as citizens, asylum seekers and migrants. During this pandemic they have already contributed considerably to our wellbeing as doctors, nurses, care staff, delivery drivers.

If they are an expression of the breadth and depth of our societies, then they should also become a source of that breadth and depth. Our ancient quarrels have not been bred in their bones and they have much to teach us as we pare back the onion layers of prejudice and indifference, as we must do if we are to live in a society that has an emotionally rich core.

And there are those, best symbolised by residents in care homes but not restricted to them, whose needs have never been too far up the policy agenda and not just during the pandemic. This includes, of course, the elderly.

Most of us are going to be old someday and it is in the interests of the whole of society for us all to be able to

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approach that state of being without paralysing anxieties which then flow through to our families.

Here in Northern Ireland, it was only when I was able to talk about it to my mother, who was born into hardship in 1920, that I was able to get some idea of what the term “National Health Service” meant to her generation. Not having to worry about what to do or where to go when you’re sick.

The effect on the mental health and morale of a whole of society was incalculable because it was without limit. That system of healthcare was devised during a world war, and implemented in its aftermath (in the middle of another shedload of debt). So we know that it can be done – if it is a priority.

Although I’ve kept it until near the end, there is pre-eminently the simple human priority to ensure that no child



lives in poverty. Why would any democratic government not have that as a centrepiece of its social priorities? Why would any civilised society not consider making the necessary sacrifices?

Perhaps these are the questions which should be debated before rushed decisions are made that come to light, to our embarrassment and shame, 30 years from now. “Is that the best you could do?”

Thinking about the helplessness and dependence of children is not just for Christmas. Reflecting on this and its consequences in one of his letters from prison, the Lutheran theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote, “... we cannot approach the manger as we approach the cradle of any other child. Whoever goes to this manger goes to where something will happen. When you leave the manger you leave either condemned or delivered ... either broken into pieces or knowing the compassion of God coming to you”.

Is this the wisdom that will guide the policy of governments? If not, what wisdom will?

WCC expresses solidarity with US churches as they raise “prophetic voices in the midst of this new and acute crisis”

In a letter sent to World Council of Churches (WCC) member churches in the United States, WCC interim general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca expressed the renewed and strengthened solidarity of the WCC amid the violence and lawlessness currently challenging the nation.



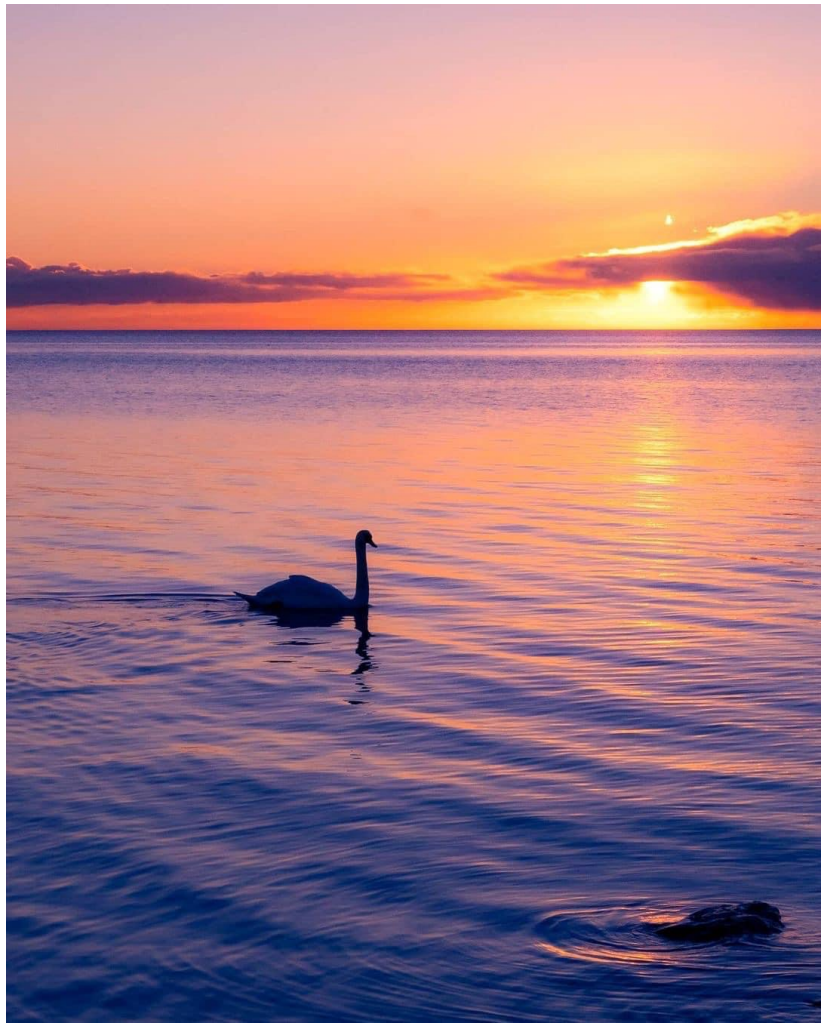
“We witnessed scenes that few of us ever expected to see,” wrote Sauca. “Sadly however, when division, confrontation, denigration and misinformation become the primary modalities of political discourse, and when the pursuit of power supersedes the common good as the main objective of political leaders, such outcomes – or worse – are ultimately inevitable.”

Sauca added that the global ecumenical fellowship has been inspired by the Christian witness that many church leaders in the United States have given throughout the years, including during the aftermath of the attack on the US Capitol.

“Through this letter, I wish to convey to you the renewed and strengthened solidarity of all WCC member churches with you as you raise your prophetic voices in the midst of this

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new and acute crisis, and as you hope and pray for a peaceful transition of power respecting the will of the people,” Sauca wrote. “You are called to be the shepherds of a deeply divided, distrusting and frightened flock, whose fears and differences have been played upon by those seeking to secure and maintain political power for themselves.”



Great harm has been done in the process, Sauca noted. “The burden of rebuilding trust and promoting reconciliation in such a widely polarized society is an impossibly heavy one for you to carry alone,” he wrote. “We pray that God will gift each of you and all of us a special measure of wisdom and strength to work together to meet this challenge.”

Sauca assured US churches of the accompaniment and support of sister churches.

“May your churches and country find the peace and joy assured to us in the scriptures,” Sauca concluded. “And we pray that God will lead us all together and be our guide on

the path of understanding and compassion, towards justice and peace.”

Text of full letter here -

[[] <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-letter-to-the-member-churches-in-the-united-states-of-america>]

Death of Bishop Robert (Roy) Alexander Warke, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (1988 to 1998)

The Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, has made the following statement upon receiving the news of the death of his predecessor, the Right Reverend Robert (Roy) Alexander Warke, who was Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross from 1988 to 1998.

“I am very sad indeed to hear, and to convey to the clergy and people of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and to the wider community in Cork City and County, the news of the death, last evening in Dublin, of our former Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, the Right Reverend Robert (Roy) Alexander Warke.

“Bishop Warke’s daughter telephoned me with the news this morning and, naturally, his death, coming as it does only nineteen days following the funeral of his wife Mrs Eileen Warke, is a great shock to everyone. They were an inseparable couple and much loved while they were here.



Episcopal succession: Bishop Roy Warke (left) with (centre) his successor Bishop Paul Colton, and his predecessor, Bishop Samuel Poyntz (right) at Kingston College, Mitchelstown, County Cork in 2011.

“At a personal level, Bishop Warke was always a constant, prayerful, practical and friendly support to me as his successor, and, following his retirement, took a keen interest in the Diocese and in all that is going on in Cork. He recently sent his greetings on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the consecration of St Fin Barre’s Cathedral.

“Many people in the United Dioceses still recall and refer to his sermon and involvement in the major Diocesan celebration in 1995 for the Decade of Evangelism held in Millstreet, County Cork when all clergy and people of the Diocese and further afield were invited to be present.

“On my own behalf and on behalf of us all in Cork, Cloyne and Ross I extend our sincere sympathy to Bishop and Mrs Warke’s family, especially to his daughters Ruth and Jane and their families,

“Bishop Warke was Bishop of this Diocese from 1st February 1988 until his retirement at the end of 1998. He returned to visit the Diocese as my and our guest on a number of significant occasions including for the 250th anniversary of Kingston College in Mitchelstown when the photograph below of him (on the left) with me and Bishop Samuel Poyntz (his immediate predecessor) was taken.

Irish nun, 102, says she wants Covid-19 vaccine to be given to "a young person or frontline worker before me'

An Irish nun who lived through the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 says she wants young people and frontline health care workers to receive the Covid-19 vaccine before she does.

Sr Colette Hickey, who turns 103 this year, insists the vaccine would be wasted on her, and wants to see the first few doses put to better use.

"Would it be a waste on me? I'd prefer if it was given to anybody younger or somebody on the frontline first," she told the Irish Examiner.

Due to Ireland's policy of vaccinating its most vulnerable citizens first, Sr Hickey was due to have her first jab on January 11.

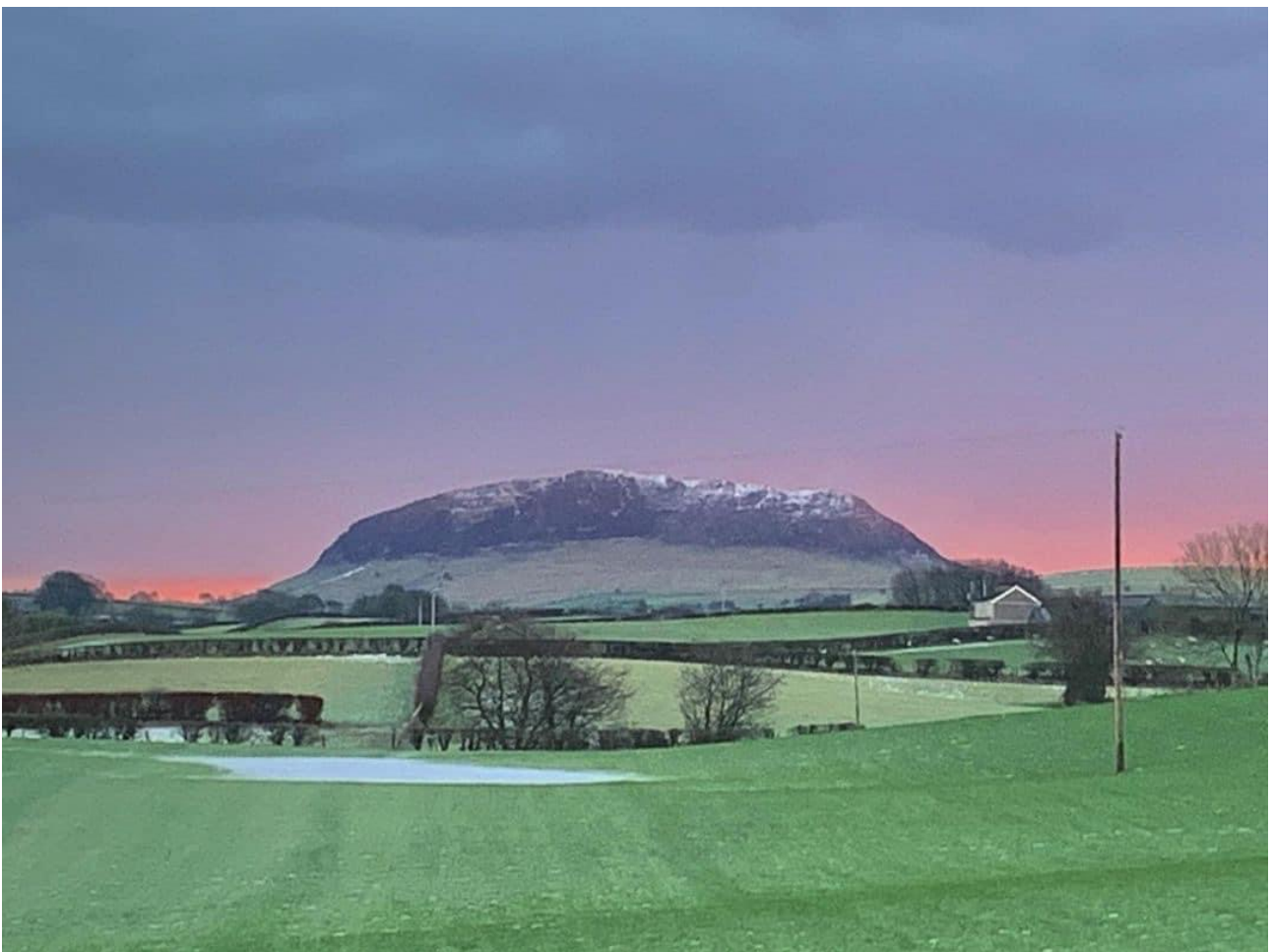
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The Cork-based nun, who won the inaugural winner of the Cork Person of the Year award in 1993, insists she wants someone else to go in her stead.

She says she doesn't really remember the Spanish Flu outbreak properly "because we didn't get any news then like you have now."

However, Sr Hickey says she remembers the Second World War "because there was nothing; commodities were very scarce", and remembers the polio outbreak in Cork in 1956 "because a neighbour got it".

The 102-year-old says she puts her longevity on this Earth down to having "a fairly good sense of humour".



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"I don't know how the Lord has left me here so long. I was always happy and contented in myself and I've had very good health, thank God," she said.

"There's no sign of me going yet."

Moderator will host first Grasping the Nettle event of the year

The Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, will host an online presentation and discussion for the ecumenical charity Grasping the Nettle on Wednesday 20 January at 7.30 pm.

The event, 'Neuroscience Meets the God of the Letter to the Colossians', will feature Dr Peter Bowes, a Baptist minister turned psychotherapist from Cumbria, who will share what he has learned during his life-long study of of mind, soul, God and the meaning of our lives.

The presentation is the first of the year for Grasping the Nettle, following last year's series of discussions exploring faith, science and meaning in our times, which were also hosted by Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair.

The Moderator encourages everyone who enjoys discussing the big questions in life to join him for the event.

‘Occasionally the impression is given that if you are a person of faith, you’ve switched off your brain and opted instead for superstition,’ he says.



“Grasping the Nettle exists to challenge that notion, to demonstrate that faith is for those who love to think and explore and to ask the big questions.

“To that end, I can’t wait to get stuck into this new series of online events and I hope that lots of folks will join me.’

Other plans for the coming year include sessions on:

'Understanding Atheism' with Prof Peter S. Williams from Southampton and NLA University, Oslo

'Who was Adam?' with Professor David Fergusson, formerly of the University of Edinburgh and shortly heading to the University of Cambridge

Everyone is invited to join the discussion, either as a participant or as an interested observer.

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To register email Grasping the Nettle at
[office@graspingthenettle.org]

Find out more on the Grasping the Nettle website.

C of I worship resource for the time of Coronavirus

The Liturgical Advisory Committee of the Church of Ireland has launched a newly constructed Service of the Word for use during the time of Coronavirus. The liturgy, which is available at a link on the Church of Ireland website, is intended to support clergy, readers and congregations as they seek to reflect the current global pandemic in their continuing worship. The liturgy can act as a standalone service, or sections of it (including some additional prayers and resources appended to the material) can be used to supplement other acts of worship.

Speaking about the service, the LAC's Vice-Chair, the Venerable Ricky Rountree, said: 'Like all of us in the Church, the LAC had hoped that the initial response to the pandemic might be short lived. However, it became apparent in the Autumn of 2020 that this would not be the case. Indeed, at the time when this material will go live on the website, churches on every part of this island have reverted to online worship.

'While the focus of worship should always be the Lord Jesus Christ, it is right to reflect the global situation in an appropriate way when we gather in person or online for services. This material is quite straightforward and it is not

lengthy, so we hope it may be of use for those preparing online worship as well as in person worship when we return to our Church buildings. Although the liturgy offered takes the form of a Service of the Word, it is easily adapted to Eucharistic situations – where it is safe to do so. I am pleased to commend this new material to the Church, on behalf of the LAC.”

'The polar opposite of earth shattering', says Mary McAleese on Pope Francis allowing women to be more involved in mass

The former Irish Presidents says the Pontiff's allowing women to be more involved in mass was “the polar opposite of earth shattering”.

Former Irish President Mary McAleese has said a change made to canon law by Pope Francis to allow women to be more involved in Mass is “the polar opposite of earth shattering”, Mark Bain reports in the Belfast Telegraph

While making the change Pope Francis continued to affirm that women cannot be priests.

Mrs McAleese, herself a devout catholic, said all the new laws will do is right a wrong and that the position of the church hasn't changed in any real way.

Pope Francis amended the law to formalise and institutionalise what is common practice in many parts of the

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world: that women can read the Gospel and serve on the altar as Eucharistic ministers.

Previously, such roles were officially reserved to men even though exceptions were made.

Pope Francis said he was making the change to increase recognition of the “precious contribution” women make in the Church, while emphasising that all baptised Catholics have a role to play in the Church’s mission.

But he also noted that doing so further makes a distinction between “ordained” ministries such as the priesthood and diaconate, and ministries open to qualified laity.

The change comes as the Pope remains under pressure to allow women to be deacons — ministers who perform many



of the same functions as priests, such as presiding at weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Mrs McAleese, who served as Irish President from 1997 until 2011, has been critical of the Catholic Church in the past, particularly over the role played by women and its views on LGBT issues.

“The change to canon law made by Pope Francis is the polar opposite of earth shattering,” she said.

“It is minimal but welcome all the same for it is at last an acknowledgement that it was wrong of Pope Paul VI to ban women from the stable lay roles of lector and acolyte which remarkably he did after the Second Vatican Council.”

She said the law as it stood had always been “untenable”.

“These two roles were opened only to laymen simply and solely because of embedded misogyny at the heart of the Holy See which continues today,” said Mrs McAleese.

“The law as it stood until Pope Francis’ change was always untenable, unjust and ludicrous given that in many parishes women have been informally reading the scriptures and acting as altar servers despite the laws.”

Mrs McAleese previously hit out at the Catholic Church, calling it an “empire of misogyny”, comments made ahead of a conference in Rome about women’s roles in the Church when she also raised the ban on women becoming priests.

“Pope Francis has said that the issue of women’s ordination isn’t up for discussion, that women are permanently excluded from priesthood,” she has previously stated.

“I believe that women should be ordained, I believe the theology on which that is based is pure codology. I’m not even going to be bothered arguing it. Sooner or later it’ll fall apart, fall asunder under its own dead weight.”

McAleese said she wished to “pose a much more profound question” instead.



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“If you are going to exclude women in perpetuity from priesthood and if all decision-making, discernment and policy-making in the Church is going to continue to be filtered through the male priesthood, tell me how in justice and charity, but most importantly in equality, are you going to include the voices of women in the formation of the Catholic faith?” she said at the time.

The former President of Ireland was barred by the Vatican from taking part in an International Women’s Day conference which was due to take place in Rome in March 2018.

That event was organised by the Voices of Faith group, which is seeking to “empower and advocate for Catholic women to have a seat at the table of decision making in the Catholic Church”.

Belfast-born McAleese, now Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin and a Professor of Children, Law and Religion at Glasgow University, has been a long time supporter of LGBT rights. Her son Justin McAleese, who is gay, was a high-profile campaigner during the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum.

She has often spoken publicly about frustrations with the Church over its stringent views on LGBT people.

News briefs

Greenisland church hall for Covid jab roll-out -

Greenisland Old School Surgery will use the Church of

Ireland hall at Station Road as a distribution centre for the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines. To assist with the delivery, the surgery is seeking volunteers to help with signposting patients, managing carparking, helping to clean chairs and storage of equipment at Church of the Holy Name, Station Road. The church is currently closed for worship due to Covid restrictions.

Radio Ulster's Morning Service on Sunday - (17th January), at 10.15am, will be led by the Revd Dr Andrew Campbell of St Patrick's Church, Broughshane, Co. Antrim. The service will be available after broadcast at

[] www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007cphq

A new webcam has been installed in Sligo Cathedral -

This will significantly enhance the picture quality and the sound which has been an ongoing issue. Mass is celebrated daily at 10.30am & 7.00pm at [] <https://sligocathedral.ie/live-feed-from-cathedral>]

WCC pastoral letter following Capitol Riots - conveys solidarity to USA church leaders raising prophetic voices in midst of this new crisis, and hoping and praying for a peaceful transition of power respecting the will of the people.

Sandes Soldiers' Homes founder - Tralee woman Elise Sandes (1851-1934) set up more than 30 Sandes Soldiers' Homes in Ireland and India for soldiers' recreation and welfare. "I try to make my homes not institutes or clubs... but in the truest sense of the word 'homes'," she said in 1877

Free Presbyterian Church votes to suspend public worship - Congregations of the Free Presbyterian Church

in Northern Ireland have voted to suspend public worship in its churches with immediate effect. The general presbytery of the FP church, representing 61 congregations across the province, confirmed its decision was taken by ministers and elders, conscious of the increasing seriousness of the Covid pandemic in Northern Ireland. The presbytery stated that “Christ’s Church has a moral obligation to contribute in a tangible fashion toward curbing the spread of the virus”.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby - Staying home is loving your neighbour. Wearing a mask is loving your neighbour. Keeping your distance is loving your neighbour. Washing your hands is loving your neighbour. Let’s keep loving our neighbours.

Pointers for prayer

We pray for those who have lost jobs in the last months and are now seeking new employment. May their confidence in their abilities stay strong and may unexpected doors open for them to new opportunities for work.

The COVID19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in the lives and livelihoods of so many. We pray today for God to give us the means to help rebuild hope and confidence in people, through practical help as well as emotional and spiritual support.

Today we pray for the USA. We pray for stable democracy and an end to divisions in the USA as a new president is inaugurated this month.

Today we pray for teachers and students. As the new term starts, schools have faced a lack of clarity over reopening which has made it more difficult to plan appropriate

education for students and has left teachers and support staff without clear guidance.

Today we pray for disarmament and non-proliferation treaties. As Iran have accelerated their nuclear programme and with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons about to come into force, we pray for constructive relationships between nations.

As we begin a new year that none of us would have imagined this time last January, we pray for God to give a sense of purpose and faith that he has good plans for us, however the year unfolds.

Today we pray for COP26. The global climate conference, rescheduled from 2020, will be taking place in Glasgow in 2021. We pray for ambition and action from world leaders on climate change, and pray that those already affected by climate chaos would be kept safe.

Speaking to the Soul

Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel! Luke 2:29-32 NLT

Eight days after Jesus' birth his parents took him to the temple for his circumcision. There is no suggestion that the people of Jerusalem understood the significance of this moment. All that the people saw was a poor young couple presenting their baby in the way that people did every day. But two elderly people did understand what was going on.

Simeon and Anna had been longing for this day and it had finally come!

Our verses today form what is known as the Nunc Dimittis, Simeon's famous prayer of thanks for this miraculous moment. He had been looking forward to this day for so long that he could now die in peace. As a Jew he recognized that this was a glorious moment for the people of Israel. But it was much, much more. In this little scrap of life he recognised the Messiah who had come not merely for the Jews, but for the whole world.

Simeon and Anna understood what was going on because they were people of prayer. They had devoted their lives to waiting on God. Anna was 84 and had been a widow for seven years. We are told that she was a prophetess and never left the temple. Luke tells us that she worshipped God night and day, fasting and praying. The deep understanding and insight of these two people arose from lives that were shaped by prayer. They had got to know God so well that they were able to understand what he was doing in the world.

Time and again in these daily devotionals we have been reminded of the importance of prayer as a way of life. Simeon and Anna are a supreme illustration of this and an inspiration to us as we live for God day by day.

QUESTION

What have you learnt from the example of Simeon and Anna?

PRAYER

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Lord, thank you that you want us to live in continual partnership with you in prayer. By your Spirit inspire us with the example of Simeon and Anna and help us to share more of our lives with you in prayer. Amen.

