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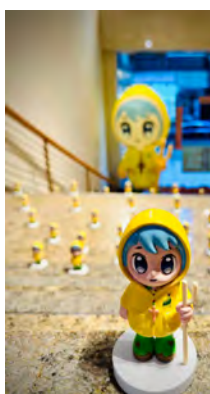
THE HOMESTEAD

Happy New Year 2025

As autumn concluded in November and winter commenced thereafter, 2024 has swiftly come to a close. As we welcome the New Year, it is paramount to reflect on the significance of hope, faith, and renewal that this time of the year brings. "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Pope Francis has announced that 2025 will be a Jubilee Year, an event that occurs once every 25 years. The theme for Jubilee Year 2025, "Pilgrims of Hope," offers special graces through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, local pilgrimages, and the Jubilee Indulgence. The Jubilee Year officially began on 24 December 2024, with Pope Francis opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In the Diocese of Hong Kong, the Holy Year commenced on 29 December 2024, and will conclude on 28 December 2025. This year will be a beacon of hope for a world suffering from the impacts of war, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis.

Therefore, let us welcome the New Year with the official mascot of the 2025 Jubilee, Luce!



THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Pastoral

Lend Support For Those Who Have Lost Their Child

By: Deacon Alex Kwok

Men are mortal. Death is a certainty everybody has to stare at face to face sooner or later. The life expectancy of this city is eighty plus. Thus, for senior citizens over eighty-five, every single day is already a bonus. Despite our advances in medical technologies, senior citizens do not generally desire longevity due to their physical frailties as well as loneliness. Imagine your relatives and friends are passing away one by one; your beloved ones as well as your soulmates are leaving you behind on earth ... Living in such loneliness is unbearable for most of us. Still, in Chinese culture, funerals of octogenarians are “joyous funerals”!

On the other hand, funerals of youngsters and infants cause greater sorrows. The deceased possessed a lot of unfulfilled potentials extinguished by their untimely deaths. They could have broken a lot of new grounds in unsolved problems in mathematics, natural sciences and medical technologies etc. to leave behind a legacy beneficent to all humanity. They could have contributed to the prosperity, stability and a better governance of societies for the future generations. They could have helped build a more harmonious and peaceful world where liberty, equality and fraternity would be a reality ... It is pitiful to see that they no longer have the opportunity to share their sweetness and their joy with their (intended) spouses to weave their dreams. Together with their comrades, they could have set honourable exemplars for the younger generations who would come after them ... Their untimely deaths turn all these eventualities to null.

Pity those white-haired seniors who have lost their inheritors. It took decades to groom capable successors and now outsiders would take over. Perhaps they do not need our sympathy because they have already resigned to fate, knowing that their days are numbered and there is no hope to reclaim the loss. They have accepted and contained the loss. Pity the would-be retirees who have lost their young adult child who would have a promising future and be capable of providing his/her parents a secure retirement. It would have been too late to give birth to a second child to carry on the mission. There is no hope to reclaim the loss. Compared with the octogenarians, who are more painful? I guess the longer parents have spent their lives with their lost children, the more painful the loss will be, unless you have surrendered to fate! Pity the young couples who have lost their firstborns. But unlike the two categories of people mentioned before, their pains are proportionally less traumatic because they still have hope even though they are less capable to manage their pains and losses!

Indeed, hope is something which sustains us in painful times which are part and parcels of a genuine life. Without hope, life is extremely unbearable. Where can we place our hope, if not in God? The Psalter says it well, “*Put no trust in princes, in children of Adam powerless to save. Who breathing his last, returns to the earth; that day all his planning comes to nothing*” (Psalms 146:3-4). Yahweh is eternal and thus more trustworthy than mortals. Moreover, He is merciful. He too has lost His only begotten Son on the cross in order to save humanity. He knows far better than anybody the pains of losing a child and He saves!

Beloved brethren! God is our authentic hope. Others won't last. In November, let us pray together with the Pope that all parents who mourn the loss of a son or daughter find support in their community, and may receive peace of heart from the Spirit of Consolation. Amen.

God bless!



THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Pastoral



The Three Comings of Christ

By: Sr. Victoria Victorino, PDDM

In the liturgy of the Advent season, we hear our preachers talking to us of the two comings of Christ: his coming in the end time or the *Parousia*, and his coming to us as the newborn Babe in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago or the Incarnation mystery.

Saint Bernard instead talks of the three comings of the Lord. In the Office of Reading of December 4, we read: *"We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible. In the first coming he was seen on earth, dwelling among men; he himself testifies that they saw him and hated him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God, and they will look on him whom they pierced. The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves, and they are saved. In his first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming he comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming he will be seen in glory and majesty. Because this coming lies between the other two, it is like a road on which we travel from the first coming to the last. In the first, Christ was our redemption; in the last, he will appear as our life; in this middle coming, he is our rest and consolation."*

Serendipitously, our Advent candles in OLMC Church this year concretely depict this 'journey theme' of Christ's three coming. We move from one candle to the other as the Sundays of Advent progresses. This symbolizes our journey from 'light to Light' or we can also say, from 'faith to Faith.' The little lights of our human life gradually 'merges' with the great Light of Christ, the Life of the world. Our flickering faith gradually gets strengthened by the solid Faith of Christ in the love and fidelity of the Father.

We are living in the in-between-time, this period of the 'intermediate coming' or the daily encounter with Christ. We need not fear anything. Even in these winter months, these dark, dreary and cold days, when people tend to feel 'down and out' Christ is present, here and now, walking with us, sustaining us, loving us. And so, we welcome the coming of the Lord, not only in the Christmas season, but at all times; not only in the Eucharistic celebration, but in our daily encounter with each other, especially with our sisters and brothers who are greatly challenged by life's difficulties.

This Christmas season also highlights the Opening of the Jubilee Year 2025 with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope." Here in the Diocese of Hong Kong we will have the Opening of the Jubilee Year on 29th of December at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Please join us in the upcoming activities, especially the pilgrimages that OLMC Church has organized as part of the celebration of the Jubilee.

As we greet each other a blessed and joyful Christmas, let us also assure every one of our constant prayer and support, making each one's journey toward full union with God a real pilgrimage of faith, hope and love.

In Christ we pray!

THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Liturgical Bible Study

LBS Corner: “About Advent”

The season of Advent was developed over time, as this event is highly anticipated tradition observed by us, the Catholic faithful, through the years, these are the facts we need to know about the roots and meanings of Advent.

1. Advent is a time of expectation and preparation for the birth of the Lord.

The word Advent comes from the Latin word adventus or coming.

2. Advent has a changing start date.

It starts on the Sunday closest to the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle (November 30th). It can begin as early as November 27th or as late as December 3rd.

3. Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year.

Advent was chosen to begin the year as a representative of the time in history that Christ was not known to us. With his birth, the beginning of our faith was founded. The liturgical year ends with the feast of Christ the King, his reign over the universe.

4. The Advent season has two meanings.

It emphasizes both the celebration of Christ coming into the world as a man and also the second coming when the Lord will return again. However, according to St. Bernard of Clairvaux who said that there are three comings: Advent prepares not just for the first coming of Christ to Israel – the Incarnation in Bethlehem, or even the second at the end of time – the Final Judgement. There is a third coming between these two in which Jesus comes in spirit and power for our rest and consolation – through the perpetual sacramental presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

5. Hope is a predominant theme of Advent.

*The Israelites hoped for a Messiah to come, and Christ entered the world.
We are hopeful for the arrival of Christ again into the world.*

6. Advent is a reminder that the Old Testament promises of the coming of the Messiah.

The Advent tradition of the Jesse Tree consists of symbols of the Messiah coming from the line of Jesse (Lk 3: 23-38). Isaiah is often read during this season to remember that we are waiting for the day when the Messiah will come again.

7. Advent focuses on the light as opposed to darkness.

Christ enters our dark world and casts away the darkness of sin to redeem us. He will come again as the light of the world.

8. Advent has two parts.

The first portion the First Sunday of Advent until December 16th is preparation for the second coming of Christ. The second portion from 17th to 24th December directly prepares us for the commemoration of the first coming of Christ, Christmas.

9. The origins of Advent can be traced back to the church in France.

In the 4th century, the church in France used the period before Epiphany as a time of preparation for Baptism. It was called "St. Martin's Lent" for the 40 days that started on November 11th, feast of St. Martin of Tours.

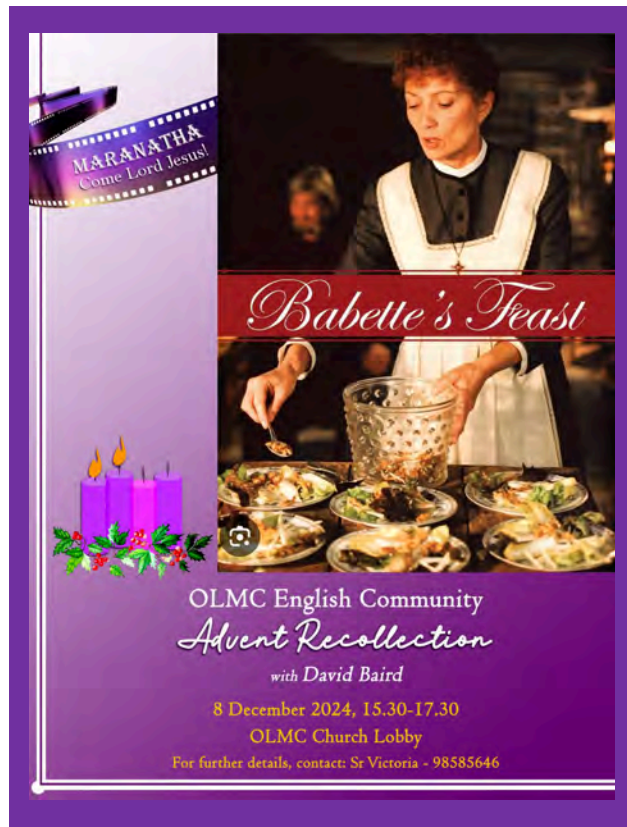
10. Advent, as we know it today, was developed in Rome.

Pope Gregory I in the late 6th/early 7th century composed many of the prayers, antiphons, and psalm responses. Many themes and ideas we now know can be traced to the Roman Advent Season.

This article is referenced from (i) <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/> and (ii) <https://nolacatholic.org/the-history-of-advent>

THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Advent



Advent Recollection

This is an interactive retreat with a twist

THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Lighting The Advent Candles

Advent

Advent represents the time of waiting and preparation for both the celebration of Jesus's birth at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, often referred to as Advent Sunday.

1st Advent Candle:

Represents **HOPE** and the anticipation of Christ's coming, recalling the prophecies about the Messiah and the hope He brings to the world...



2nd Advent Candle:

Represents **PEACE**, and commemorates Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem...



3rd Advent Candle:

Reflects the **JOY** that comes through Jesus' arrival, and through the salvation he has gifted us...



4th Advent Candle:

Represents **LOVE**, the ultimate love of God that He might send His only Son for us. This is lit the Sunday before Christmas, leading us to eagerly await the new Kingdom of God on earth...



THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

English Sunday School

Nativity Play

The nativity story follows Mary and Joseph from being told they will have a baby by the angel Gabriel, through to the birth of Jesus and the visits from the shepherds and wise men. The English Sunday School Level 1 children had a lot of fun participating in this nativity play and making the scriptures come to life. The day ended with the exchange of gifts.

By: Teacher Chinny Astillero



THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

The Living Rosary Group

A Prayer To Remember What Christmas Is All About

Lord, I thank You for coming to earth so You could redeem me. When I think of the extent to which You were willing to go in order to save me, it makes me want to shout, to celebrate, and to cry with thankfulness. You love me so much, and I am so grateful for that love. Without You, I would still be lost and in sin. But because of everything You have done for me, today I am free; my life is blessed; Jesus is my Lord; Heaven is my home; and Satan has no right to control me. I will be eternally thankful to You for everything You did to save me! I pray this in Jesus' name! Amen!



THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Community

Have you ever considered “Prayer as an Act of Love”?

"Prayer is an act of love; words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love"

Saint Teresa of Avila

Well she is a doctor of the church, so I think we can take some time to understand what she meant by it and how we can also transform our prayer into an act of Love. This article will be the start of a series on the topic on prayer and sharing my journey of conversion and transformation through prayer. Most of all I would love for others to grow in this intimacy with God, which Our Father in heaven wants with each one of us.

As for me, my journey started before my conversion to Catholicism in 2014 and to understand God's will. So, I was asked to pray, I realised I have never been taught how to pray. The Filipino Aunties in my choir said, "go sit at the adoration chapel and talk to Jesus." I was quite confused at the time, because I did not understand what that meant, I went anyway.

At that time, I started my journey to learning how to pray from instructions from Jesus in the bible. Guess what it is? Yes! The Lord's Prayer (**Mt 6:9-15**) and following Jesus' instructions on how to pray in the bible (**Mt 6:5-8**). Mass was the most regular prayer I did, so I tried to worship in Mass wholeheartedly and the minimum I set myself was to listen well to the readings, homily and pray The Lord's Prayer and all the singing parts meaning the words I speak.

I had a conviction and also some struggles. The conviction was God knows all, then why should we pray? If he knows all why do we still tell him what we need? I accepted the fact that I really had no understanding of what prayer is. So I read a book called "Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone by James Martin SJ". In this book, it affirmed what I have been doing, in that there is no right or wrong way to pray and that falling asleep with your heart turned to God is also prayer.

Romans 8:26-28 holds true, at least for me, "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

At the time I needed prayer the most, the Holy Spirit was helping me with lyrics from old hymns that I know, I was just filled with so much hope that I was praying without me realising because the Holy Spirit was helping me. It was very encouraging for me.

How about starting this journey with some reflective questions for ourselves, since to understand and change the first step is to have self-awareness on what we are doing.

Before you start these reflection questions on prayer, I suggest:

Make space for prayer, play some music that calms you down, listen to it till the end, then start: -

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you all for the gifts you have given to me till today, please forgive me for the times I am unable to praise you. My heart is unknown to me, please search my heart so that I can know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly. Come be with me and guide me through the reflection. I know your voice is encouraging and not condemning. Your sheep knows your voice and help me hear your voice. Amen

Write the answers down in a journal: -

- What is the reason/motivation for me to pray now?
- When do I usually pray? How often is this? How much time do I spend praying?
- What is my preferred prayer method? Rosary? Petition? Novena? Mass? Our Father? Sing? Adoration? Meditation? Contemplation? Etc., Etc.
- What is the proportion of my prayer life that is silent and contemplative in nature?
- Am I aware of God's voice and presence in prayer?

Now with the answers to the questions, if you so desire to have a closer relationship with the Lord, offer the details of your prayer life up as your sacrifice next Mass you attend and ask the Lord to help you get closer to Him and show you the way of prayer that suits you the most in conversing with Him. Praying for your all!

In Christ's Love, Joy and Peace, Sally

THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

2025 Jubilee Pilgrimage



First Jubilee Pilgrimage at Yim Tin Tsai

By Sr. Victoria Victorino, PDDM

With the Opening of the Jubilee Year 2025, a special season of grace has come upon the whole Catholic Church. Here in Hong Kong, nine churches were declared as pilgrimage churches where the Plenary Indulgence may be obtained, following certain conditions. Among these churches was the Chapel of St. Joseph located in Yim Tin Tsai (“YTT”), an offshore island which is part of Sai Kung District.

Warmly encouraged by our Parish Priest, Fr. Thomas Law, we opened the New Year 2025 with a “Jubilee Pilgrimage” in this Chapel. Three busloads of pilgrims set out to the island on the first day of January. The pilgrimage started with the Eucharistic Celebration at St. Joseph Chapel, presided by Rev. Fr. Josekutty Mathew, CMF. Right at the start of the Eucharist, Fr. Mathew helped us to discern and define what a pilgrimage is; it is not a simple outing or a picnic, but an intentional journey, meaning, done with a particular intention at heart: “Why do I want to do this pilgrimage? What is the special grace that I ask for as I do this?” It is not enough to obtain the Plenary Indulgence in the Jubilee Year. Change for the better must also happen; there must be a real growth in our following of Christ. *(to be continued on P11)*

THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

Community

(Cont'd from P10) Delving deeply into the liturgical readings of that day, Fr. Mathew helped us pilgrims to orient the New Year 2025 with three main pointers. First, he proposed that our greeting to each other today must not simply be “Happy New Year,” but more meaningful words of blessing, as given in the First Reading of the day (see Nm 6:22-27). In saying, “*May the Lord bless you and keep you...*” our relationships with each other then become bonds and showers of blessing. Second, inspired by the Gospel reading of the day, he reflected that even if we cannot imitate our Blessed Mother who pondered God’s marvels in her heart, we can perhaps imitate the shepherds who visited the Christ child in the manger. They made known the message that had been told them about the Child, they glorified and praised God for all they had heard and seen (see Lk 2:16-21). We too can continue to proclaim the Good News that we have received and share with everyone the marvels that the Lord continues to work in our lives. Lastly, Fr. Mathew reflected on the word ‘*the fullness of time*’ inspired by the Second Reading (see Gal 4:4-7). It is God who determines what is the ‘fullness of time’ for each one of us, what it means and when it comes. Trusting in God’s divine mercy and providence, we then put ourselves in his hands as we start this New Year 2025 and live out our calling to be true ‘pilgrims of hope.’

At the end of the Mass, Deacon Alex Kwok briefly completed the reflection on the meaning of the Jubilee celebration, adding to it the important elements of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. And the last reflection of the day was given by Kim Chan Wan Ying, staff member of the Salt and Light Preservation Centre, who briefly explained the beginning of the missionary work in YTT especially the work of Saint Joseph Freinedemetz, SVD in the island in the 1880s which led to the conversion of the original Hakka villagers into the Catholic faith. He noted the importance of the Church in the village as a unifying element for the villagers.

After the sumptuous lunch shared among us, we proceeded to the Prayer activity called The Nature Trail of Reconciliation, a prayer-walk. Designed by Rev. Fr. Dominic Chan whose ancestors were part of YTT village, the prayer entailed walking through the trail and praying from one station to another, reflecting on one’s relationship with God, with nature, with oneself and others. Integrated within this nature walk was the viewing of unique artworks stationed in various spots of the island, making YTT truly a ‘living art museum.’

Our first Jubilee Pilgrimage ended by visiting the YTT Salt Pan revived ten years ago; it is now part of the tourist attraction of the village. It was a significant ‘ending’ to the opening of the Jubilee Year pilgrimages, reminding us of our call to be ‘salt of the earth,’ giving ‘savoury taste’ to our human relationships through our acts of faith, hope and charity.

Refer also to article published in Sunday Examiner on 10 January 2025 - <https://www.examiner.org.hk/2025/01/10/year-of-pilgrims-of-hope-begins-with-a-pilgrimage-to-yim-tin-tsai/news/hongkong/>



THE HOMESTEAD – WINTER

English Sunday School

Sacraments

By: Teacher Levinna Natalia

The Sunday School Level 2 children are learning about the Seven Sacraments in the Catholic Church. Through engaging lessons, they are discovering the significance of each sacrament in our Catholic faith, from the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist), the Sacraments of Healing (Penance and the Anointing of the Sick), and the Sacraments of the Service of Communion (Marriage and Holy Orders). The children are learning how these sacred rites strengthen their relationship with God and the Church community. With interactive activities like decoding sacramental matter and form, solving puzzles, and matching sacrament names, we hope to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the grace and love that the sacraments bring into our lives.



Sacraments

Q: How many sacraments are there?



The OLMC Editorial
team wishes
everyone a Happy
Chinese New Year!
Kung Hei Fat Choi!



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