

My Uncle John

A good many years ago, I passed my driving test and bought an old and rather battered car, which my brother and I often had to push to make it start. It was the first car my family had ever owned and we decided to travel in it to Cornwall, in the West of England, for our summer holidays. So, in preparation, my brother and I polished the car; we, then, changed its oil, renewed all its spark plugs and the night before we were to go, we decided to drive to the garage to fill it with petrol – but, to our dismay, it would not start. We pushed and pushed to bump start it, we checked and cleaned all the spark plugs again, but it resisted all our efforts – my brother and I were desolate!

My mother suggested that I ring her brother, my Uncle John, who worked in a car factory, but I was a little hesitant because he lived in another part of London and we had not seen him for over a year and it seemed a little cheeky, after all that time, to ask for help. However, I plucked up my courage and phoned him and, to my astonishment and delight, he said to me he would come over. He arrived in no time and, in even less time, fixed the problem – I had replaced the spark plug caps in the wrong order! He and his wife, who came with him, stayed on and we had a very enjoyable evening and this was a new beginning in our relationship with Uncle John. We became much closer friends and all because, when I was in trouble, I asked for help.

And that, in a nutshell, is the kernel of Christmas, the waiting period for which, Advent, we begin next Sunday. There is, however, one difference: my Uncle John came when I told him I was in trouble and asked him for help. At Christmas, the Lord also came, because I was in trouble, but he knew about the trouble long before I did and also long before I asked for help. He came and he waited - waited until I realised that I needed help and then waited even longer, until I was ready to invite him in. The courtesy of God is astonishing.

The whole of the Scriptures speaks of this courtesy, but we often miss it. The Lord gently offers his help, but he does not force his way in; his hands are tied by the respect and reverence in which he holds us - and if he has to wait outside in a stable, because I have not found the courage to ask for his help, then he will wait.

But, how do I invite him in? There is only one way and that is the same way as I invited my Uncle John. I have to admit that I am in a mess and need his help. I may not dictate how he should come, nor tell him what he must do when he does come, I may only ask for help – trusting him as I trusted my uncle John - but he has never failed me.

However, I also need to understand that this "*asking*" cannot be done just once and for all. The longer I live, the more I will come to realise that I need him in more and more ways – and slowly this need will deepen and I will come not just to want him to fix things, but - like Mary and Joseph - I will want him just to be there with me; I want him for himself! And then Christmas happens.

Diary

Last week, I was telling Romo Hady about my troubles with the builder renovating my house. He turned to me and said, "Why did you not ask me, Father? We have a team who look after our churches, houses etc." I felt quite silly for it had not occurred to me to ask him. However, he then phoned the Church architect; a young man called Eric, and arranged for me to meet with him at the house. The upshot of this meeting was that I realised that my builder was out of his depth and so, because he had already overrun the time limit for the renovations by a month – and

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at least another month would be needed for completion – I have cancelled the contract with him.

Now, I have to find another place to live for a month to six weeks, which is the new estimate for completion, but the Lord's hand is already at work and possibilities are appearing.

It is very unsettling to have "no fixed abode" – but I am sure that the Lord is using it to good effect – for already, as I wrote last time, I am experiencing the kindness of people towards me in my "homelessness".

One thing, which has taken my mind off things for the last ten days, has been the visit of my brother, Bern and his wife Mary – together with Josie, my ex-housekeeper from UK. It is a long time since I have spent real time with them and I am enjoying their visit immensely. Whether my brother is off the same opinion has yet to be seen. We have just come back from a visit to the north of the island and while there we took an early morning boat ride to see the dolphins. However, when we got outside the protection of the land, we found heavy seas and although we found some dolphins, we also found heavy waves and came back from the trip absolutely soaked. My poor brother sat in the front of the boat and took the brunt of the sea water and came back grumbling at such a silly idea as dolphin watching – but my sister-in-law Mary and I suddenly began to laugh at it all and could not stop. It has been a long time since I laughed so heartily!

God bless,

Terry

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