

Thought For The Day Advent 13th December

Children of God, led by the Spirit



BRINGING HOPE, RELIEVING POVERTY

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Romans 8:12 - 17

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Thought: Children of God, led by the Spirit

Debt is one of the pernicious problems of today's world. As we approach Christmas there are too many people living not so many miles from here who are drowning in debt. Daily living is a trial at the best of times but Christmas adds immeasurably to their worries. How can they even afford to feed their families over this time and buy just a few gifts to make Christmas special for their children?

Debt counselling is a vital part of the work of the local faith based charity Hope Central. They provide a lifeline to those who need support to journey through their problems and come to take back control of their finances. They experience a very real sense of freedom after a time of life sapping oppression.

When I was young, banks did not seem to allow many people to run into debt. I remember when I first opened an account testing the boundaries of my bank's generosity. I would sometimes buy a record knowing I didn't have the funds and would instantly receive a letter from the bank to say I was now a few pounds overdrawn and please rectify this immediately. These seem like very far off days now!

Now the world has a global economic system which depends on keeping entire countries in massive and unpayable debt. Millions of people live way beyond their means and live incurring ever more interest. The very poorest are often at the mercy of loan sharks who charge excessive and immoral repayment rates.

For too many people debt overtakes their every waking moment. It's an increasing call on our churches to help people in debt and to signpost them to those who can really make a difference

There is a parallel message in Romans for us today in Advent. We can be in debt to all sorts of things which close us down. "If you live according to the flesh, you will die" we read in verse 13

today. But if we live in the power of God's Spirit instead, we can receive the strength to stand up to the things which weigh us down so much, and we can live!

In Advent, as we make the time to focus on God, we can regain that sense that we are loved by God so much that he sees us as his children.

There are echoes of the Israelites journeying through the wilderness towards freedom but looking back often to their old times in Egypt where life seemed more secure but was in fact slavery. We sometimes like the comfort of what we have known even though it is destroying us slowly.

Advent is a time of waiting and discerning; listening out for the voice of God breaking into everything else through which we try to distract ourselves. And there is plenty of this going on just now!

Our passage today says that we are debtors to the God who loved us, who has saved us, and who is leading us home to the place we have been promised. Inheriting all this we shall forever be in God's debt. Sometimes we know a never ending debt of thankfulness to someone who has really made a difference to us. But this debt is not to weigh us down but to lift us up.

As we look for the coming Christ Child born anew in our hearts this Christmas we can discover again the truth that all this is to show us that God is truly with us. We are God's children and so God's heirs. So we can live with this freedom but also the responsibility to help others to know this for themselves too; in the words we share and the things we do to bring life to others everywhere!

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