



31 December 2023 - Archbishop Stephen Cottrell | A moment of Reflection.

Every week the Diocese of York offers a prayer video for churches to use either online or in their services. The Archbishop of York leads in a moment of Reflection for the First Sunday of Christmas

The text of the reflection follows in full

“When the angels had left them... the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened...’ Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart...” Luke 12 15 & 19

Today is the day we think about our New Year's resolutions for tomorrow. Well, some of us...

Usually, they are very worthy. Eat less. Drink less. Lose weight. Join a gym. Run a marathon. Learn Italian. Play the clarinet. Climb Matterhorn.

And by February, they are usually forgotten.

So why not try something different?

What about a New Year's deviation?

Forego the fast lane of self-improvement and linger in the cul-de-sac of profligate joy instead. That's what the shepherds did. They went to see Jesus. They rejoiced at what they found. That's what the Magi did (having their journeys re-directed). That's what Mary did, treasuring in her heart what God had done in her and what God was doing in Jesus Christ.

And by 'deviation', I don't mean 'do something wrong', but do something just for the sake of doing it. Allow yourself to wander from the path of your own predictabilities. As G. K. Chesterton observed: "If a job's worth doing, it's worth doing badly!"

So, write a poem. Take a nap. Bake a cake. Go for a walk. Run a bath. Say a prayer. 'Phone a friend. Count your blessings.

Life is already too frantic for most of us these days, and, for many others, busy in a different way, for nothing is so exhausting as poverty and trying to make ends meet. So, adding some worthy resolution to an already replete to do list isn't going to help.

Getting up earlier, staying up later, running faster and working harder are rarely the answer. In fact, a bit of downtime and a good night's sleep will often mean we perform much better the next time we get up. But even that turns rest into another worthy achievement, which isn't what I'm saying at all. And, as I say, rest and leisure are themselves the preserve of those who have agency and means.

But some things are good, just because they are good, not because they do you good or because you are good at them.

So, take a deviation. Find some time to waste and do nothing for a little while. This is bank holiday weekend after all. It will do you good, but that is not the point. It will be good in itself.

It is quite fashionable to call this ‘mindfulness’, though Christian people have always called it contemplation.

I just call it stopping. Or praying. Focusing on something other than our own ego or ambition. Enjoying life just because it is and resting in the abundant beauty of the moment now.

Of course, it helps if you believe in God. You are put in touch with something bigger than yourself. So, it's not too late to go and see this child that God and to treasure things in your heart because they are good.



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