Candlelight

Do you know how far away the flame from a single candle can be seen by the human eye? Well, just one candle flame, seen in still and clear air, is said to be visible (even without binoculars) as far as 30 miles away. To my way of thinking, this seems a tad over-optimistic. Maybe a building entirely lit by candles…sure, why not?

I found an interesting article a while ago that worked it out more scientifically - and it seems that the human eye is sufficiently sensitive to see the flame from a single candler (in still, clear air and no light pollution) 10 miles away - maybe a little more. So, let's not underestimate the power of candlelight… nor of candles!

Candles are routinely carried by trekkers and adventurers, not just for light, but also for emergency warmth. Victims of avalanches, who are fortunate enough to survive the impact of the snow, have been known to survive for days in snow caves. The heat from the candle can be just enough to ward off sub-zero temperatures, and prolong life until rescue arrives. So let's not underestimate the power of the humble candle, either, which is able to radiate comforting warmth as well as light.

Throughout Advent and the Christmas season, we have been lighting candles - for example, in the Advent Ring; we celebrate the lighting of the central (white) candle, which signifies the birth of the baby Jesus two thousand years ago. He was to become the Saviour of humankind; the light to the world; the light of understanding - that God loves us all. It's only God's forgiveness that can bring peace of mind - even in uncertain times like these.

There's nothing new; the same good news applied to an equally dangerous, uncertain and violent world, 20 centuries ago. It should be, and can be, a powerful message of good news for us, today, of course. But our minds have to be still enough to perceive the truth that has been alive since the birth of the Christ-child. **The Light off the World!**

Thought for the Week: It occurs to me, though, that we're not just called to be recipients of that light. We're called to be participants 'bathed' in it, and radiators of it; because Jesus consistently described His people as being like "light which is on the outside". As followers of Christ, that's light that 'reveals and illuminates' **for others to see;** light that exemplifies the relationship **we have** with our Lord.

That's simple to say (though not easy to do), that we are called to radiate back some of the light of **that relationship** - and the warmth of Jesus' - love for us, and for everyone else. It's not just bishops, priests, and missionaries who 'are that light'; it's something that everybody who loves the Lord is called-to every time we hear Jesus saying (to them then, and to us, now): "You Are the Light of the World". God intends to get his work done on earth today through you-and- me…

So, what's expected of us today, "in this fast-changing world of turmoil and tension, with problems and troubles too many to mention - our days are so crowded, our hours so few - there's so little time and so much to do".

Well, first and foremost, we need to share our Faith in Christ… God can take an ordinary person, like you and me, and use us to share His message to people who need to hear it. When we share our faith, we spread His light.

Secondly, we're called to take Light to wherever it's dark - Jesus describes what we are when he said: "**you are** the light of the world", not just the light of the church. This means that we have to get beyond the church-walls and take the light "out there", wherever it's dark, wherever there's need. It's easy to be a Christian in a building-full-of-light, isn't it? But not so easy in the 'outside world.

Thirdly, we're called to shine **together as the Church**, because Jesus also spoke of the strength of collective light. Each house in a city with its lights on casts a glow across the sky. As Christians who

come together, there is a “glow for the Lord” that we cannot create individually. We shine brightest when we shine together.

Individually, each of us might mistake ourselves as “just a single candle” in the vastness of creation - but even one candle can provide sufficient light, and warmth, and comfort that can be used by God for His good purpose. There’s no effort too small, no kindness too small, no selfless act unnoticed by Him, that can’t make a big difference in this challenging world of ours.

Yet as we light and enjoy candles of celebration, let’s remember that:

- the light of a single candle might well be visible at “just” ten miles (as I mentioned a few paragraphs ago)
- but the light from dozens of candles can be seen at thirty miles and beyond… Some of the house decorations where we live can probably be seen from the Moon!

Seriously, each one of us can make a real difference when we live for God. When we live as a visible and active Christian Community, the possibilities get magnified, beyond our imaginations, when we put into practice the prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

May I wish you all, and your families near and far, a very happy and relaxing Christmas and New Year.