

SOWING SEEDS *in prayer*

The pope's prayer intentions for the coming months are rooted in the same fertile relationship with God from which the Jesuits' work also grows, says **Fr Paul Nicholson SJ**.

In 2019, Pope Francis endorsed a series of four Universal Apostolic Preferences, designed to offer a focus for the work of the Jesuits worldwide in the decade ahead. The preferences include 'journeying with youth', 'walking with the excluded' and 'demonstrating an ecological concern, 'caring for our common home'. The first preference, however, is seen as foundational. It is 'showing the way to God', particularly through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment. Without this, the other preferences are likely to be doomed to failure.

Perhaps a similar pattern can be seen in the intentions offered for the winter months (in the northern hemisphere, at least). Taken together, they deal with weighty matters: suicide, incurable disease and war. But it is the January intention, 'for prayer with the Word of God', that underlies the others. Unless we allow ourselves the time needed to encounter God in prayer, and hear what God says to us, offers us and calls us to, the other areas are likely to be approached in vain. Such prayer builds up a Church which is then able to respond to the needs of the world, multiplying our individual efforts and, in doing so, bearing witness to the truth of the gospel.

Two of the intentions specifically refer to support and care as qualities that those in need might expect to find in meeting the followers of Christ. The November intention hopes that those considering suicide might be able to find this support in a loving community – the hope being that any local church is forming such a community. Insofar as it manages that, the Church will be demonstrating that beauty of life which the late pope believed those we are praying for will be able to recognise.

February's intention prays for that same care and support, this time for children suffering from incurable diseases. It is, of course, often not simply the children who suffer in such situations, but their entire families, and they are included in the month's prayer. Clearly it is the families as a whole who need the strength and hope that we ask God for here, not least though the work of those medical professionals who support them.

Most churches, and many individuals, pray regularly for people who live in areas of war and conflict. This

INTENTIONS FOR THIS PERIOD

NOVEMBER

For the prevention of suicide.

Let us pray that those who are tempted to commit suicide might find the support, care and love they need in their community, and be open to the beauty of life.

DECEMBER

For Christians in areas of conflict.

Let us pray that Christians living in areas of war or conflict, especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope.

JANUARY

For prayer with the Word of God.

Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

FEBRUARY

For children with incurable diseases.

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

intention is taken up in December, and it is noteworthy that the prayer suggested goes beyond asking simply for their protection and safety. It looks particularly to the witness that those Christians caught up in these situations can offer. They may not be able to stop the wars or bring

about peace negotiations single-handedly. But we pray with the biblical image of seeds being sown, here the 'seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope'. In the month when we celebrate the birth of the Christ, the Prince of Peace, it is surely fitting to apply such prayer particularly to that part of the world where 'the Word became flesh'. ●

