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15 January 2014: Tim Concannon, Parishioner St Laurence Catholic Church

Peace on Earth to Men of Goodwill

It always has the capacity to irritate me that this simple, and very important phrase, is so often traduced into Peace on Earth and Goodwill to All Men. I know that is what the Authorised version of the Bible says, but it is not the way it has been translated into English and proto-English for more than seventeen hundred years. It is not what the Greek original says either.

The difference is important:- Peace on earth and goodwill to all men is predicated on universal approval for all, no matter how unpleasant or corrupt they may be. It is non judgmental and leads to the idea that all behaviour is acceptable. Peace on earth to men of goodwill is a very different thing.

This is what Catholics call the "Grace" of God. It is available to all, without exception, if you choose to accept it, which is a life-changing step. But there are consequences. You have to listen as well as receive. That is what Jesus was saying to the Pharisees, when he said being a son of Abraham was not enough on its own. It is all about your personal disposition.

It means that the Grace is available to right-thinking men, which does not necessarily mean "Christian". Thus, in orthodox Christian teaching, it is available to anyone who is true to themselves, Muslim, Humanist, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist or what you will, provided the heart is sincere. It pays to remember that in these secular times, particularly when we are faced with increasingly strident voices maintaining that their world view is the only one that deserves a hearing.

And so, on this basis, I wish you all a happy and holy New Year