



CHRISTMAS CHEER CAN BE NOISY OR QUIET

Early this month, twenty young people from our Ballarat diocese were in Perth, attending the Australian Catholic Youth Festival. They were there with more than 5,000 other young people from around the nation. They spent three days celebrating their Catholic faith, with music and prayer and sharing stories and sitting around meal tables together.



Some of the gathering was very noisy and bright – particularly during the sessions when the five thousand young people packed into the main hall, around a central stage, and guitars and drums and lead singers filled the hall with sound and the whole crowd sang along with full voices, and bright lights moved in waves across the crowd.

On the other hand, for some of those sessions the lighting was more subdued and the place was very quiet. The quiet was most noticeable one evening, when the Blessed Sacrament was brought into the hall in a procession, by the light of candles, and the more than five thousand young people knelt in their places and spent some minutes in silence, with the lighting in the hall subdued except for a spotlight on Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.



Early on the Sunday morning, the first day of the festival, I celebrated Mass with some of the young people from our diocese. We met in the chapel of the school where they were staying. We sang to the gentle sound of a single guitar. We prayed the Mass quietly. We paused to remember our families and all those we wished to pray for. All this in the small but beautiful school chapel, set in quiet grounds on the outskirts of Perth.

After the Mass we drove into the convention centre in the heart of Perth and there the experience was very different. Suddenly we were in the midst of a great crowd of young people, with loud music and bright lights.

Yet both experiences were opportunities for prayer and the sharing of our faith. Whether in the quiet of the school chapel or the noise of the convention hall, we were expressing our faith in Christ and our union with one another.

The festival in Perth was a rich experience of faith for the young people who were there. I hope the coming feast of Christmas will be a rich experience of faith for us all. I hope this feast will bring us true Christmas cheer – the joy that comes with celebrating the birth of the Saviour.

Some of our Christmas celebrations might be bright and noisy – with a crowd at carols by candlelight, for example, or at a Mass on Christmas Eve with children of all ages, or at a large family gathering for Christmas dinner. I hope such bright and noisy times will bring us the good cheer of Christmas.

On the other hand, for some of this Christmas season we might be with a little group of people for a quiet celebration or even be by ourselves for some moments of reflection. May these quiet times be likewise times of Christmas cheer as we remember the birth of Jesus and offer thanks for the gifts the Saviour has brought into our world. A Merry Christmas to us all! God bless us, every one!

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR



*As we celebrate Christmas 2019
I wish you the peace and joy of Christ.*

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR

