

Bishop Vincent's 2023 Christmas Message

Dear brothers and sisters,

“Behold, I am doing a new thing”. These words of the prophet Isaiah have provided the inspiration for us to undertake the historic journey of synodality that culminated in our first Diocesan Synod. We have been emboldened to chart a new way forward for the local Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Galvanised by the spirit of Jesus that calls us to greater communion, participation and mission, we have been enriched rather than torn apart by our differences. Though the road towards a new horizon is full of challenges, we have moved decisively towards a model of Church that is rooted in the Trinitarian paradigm of deep mutuality, solidarity and dynamism. This is the Church united to serve that Pope Francis dreams about.

Nowhere else is this summons towards newness more radical and crystal clear than the Incarnation. Christmas is the venue for possibility. Christmas is the in-breaking of the cosmic kingdom of justice, love and peace. In Christ, God has come to make all things new. In Him, the alternative universe of compassion, equality and fraternity to the unjust, corrupt and unsustainable status quo is indeed possible. One can begin to dare to live again and flourish. Humanity is ushered to a new level.

Christmas opens us to the dawn of this new era of God's justice, love and compassion in Christ. The imperial culture of domination, exclusion and consumption can no longer hold sway. The trickle-down economy that favours the rich and disadvantages the poor can no longer be the only viable option. Christmas calls us to place the care of the vulnerable and the stewardship of all God's creation at the centre of human endeavour. A new ethic of communion not just among humans, but with all life forms must guide our way of life.

Christmas offers us the opportunity to join the divine project of reconciling all in Christ. For with the Incarnation, God has reset the cycle of human behaviour. Jesus did not follow the script of the empire. He came as a poor and humble servant in order to minister at the thresholds of human vulnerability. He rejected violence, demonisation and scapegoating. We no longer need to use violence in order to counter violence; or resort to scapegoating mechanisms to drive out

opponents. God in Christ enables us to build a new future with the very people whom we regard as outsiders and enemies.

Let us commit ourselves to the task of building a new future at home and abroad. As believers, we cannot remain indifferent to the issues that impact the lives of our brothers and sisters, whether it is the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the war in Ukraine, the ecological crisis, or the reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters in the aftermath of the Referendum.

The birth of Jesus signals God's alignment with those who are at the edges of society. Let us pattern our lives on the self-emptying God. Let us learn to abandon our default position of self-interest and mutual exclusion that leads to an unsustainable future. Let us show to others the alternative future that is inspired and guided by the vision of the God of vulnerability and radical communion.

This Christmas, as we contemplate the Christ child in the manger, let us commit ourselves to pray and work for justice in all its manifestations so that God's reign will come in our world.

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