



2024 Christmas Message

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we enter the beautiful season of Advent, the Lord invites us to open our hearts in hope and eager expectation.

We await the coming of our saviour, Jesus Christ, whose birth brings the promise of light into the darkness, joy to the sorrowful, and peace to the troubled.

This light, joy and peace are gifts which the Lord offers to us through each other, as we allow His Spirit to inspire us and empower us, opening not only our homes but also our hearts to receive the Lord Jesus among us.

The words of St Paul - *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer* (Romans 12:12) – call us to embrace this Christmas joy, even in the face of the many challenges which confront our troubled world: the ongoing war and violence in Israel, Palestine and Lebanon, in Ukraine and in Sudan, in Myanmar and in so many other places; the devastating floods in Spain; the earthquake in Japan; and the many social and economic challenges which we face here in our own country.

The Christian response to this reality of our suffering world is not to give up in despair but rather to renew our commitment to charity—love in action. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Fratelli Tutti*, charity is more than mere kindness; it is a call to love each person, especially those in greatest need. The Holy Father writes, “Love means to be near to others at the least favourable moments, the moments of change and crisis” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 94).

Christmas, which celebrates the “coming near” of Jesus to us, reminds us of our call to “come near” to those who are lost, lonely or suffering, extending our love to them in any way we can.

Jesus calls us to serve Him in each of them, for “*whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*” (Matthew 25:40).

This season of Advent is also a time for forgiveness. The birth of Jesus reveals the truth of God’s endless mercy and forgiveness. It is a mercy and forgiveness which God calls us, as his children,



to offer freely to others. Pope Francis urges us in *Amoris Laetitia*, “rediscover the value of forgiveness” so that it may bring healing to families and communities alike. It is through our large-hearted forgiveness of others that we can be the bearers of that light, joy and peace which are the Lord’s Christmas gift to us.

In the end, of course, the central message of Advent and Christmas is one of love. We are invited to make room for Christ’s love in our hearts, so that we may share that love with the world, filling our homes and communities with peace and compassion. The Scriptures assure us that the Lord is “kind and forgiving, full of love to all who call”. Made in God’s image as we are, we are called to be the same: kind, forgiving, and open to all.

If we allow ourselves as Christians to see in Christ the one who shows us the way to live our lives to the full, and if we allow ourselves to be open to the transforming power of the Spirit’s grace, then the promise of hope contained in the story of Christmas can become a reality in our lives. The world in which we live is often marked by division, hardship, and despair: if we as Christians welcome the Lord Jesus into our hearts and into our lives, we can become healers of division, relievers of hardship, and dispellers of despair. This is our challenge, and this is our privilege: to allow the Lord Jesus to transform our lives through his coming, so that He, through us, can begin to transform the lives of others. Then the hope of Christmas expressed in the words of the prophet Isaiah, that “*the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light*” (Isaiah 9:2), will be fulfilled.

May the great light of Christmas, of which the prophet Isaiah speaks, shine in your lives, in the lives of your families, and in the lives of all who are dear to you. And may that light, through you, begin to shine in the lives of everyone you meet.

I wish you all a very happy, holy and peace-filled Christmas.