



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2020

**By The Most Rev Bishop Donald Sproxton VG
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

10 December 2020

The season of Christmas is always a special time and a celebration of hope and peace in our Catholic communities. I want to assure you all that I join my prayers with yours in thanking our Divine Father for sending us the Saviour, the Son who became incarnate, Jesus Christ. Let us pray for our families and friends that the spirit of faith, peace and hope will be theirs as we look forward to a new year.

Many things have tried us in this year that is drawing to a close. The year began with the devastation of the huge fires that swept through the Eastern States and those that threatened communities in our own State. There are many families still waiting for their homes to be rebuilt and life to return to their towns. They were supported by their families and friends in communities that were not destroyed, and by many others they would never meet who volunteered or responded to the many appeals.

The tragedy of the bush fires was felt across the nation, and the response of Australians was typically extraordinary. There was a sense that we were in this together. Among the organisations that mobilised their resources was the St Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic social service agencies and the parishes that rallied and supported the many fundraisers. We should honour our people for their compassion and generosity.

That same spirit inspired our leaders when the challenge of the coronavirus pandemic engulfed nation after nation, and cases started to be found in our cities and towns. "We are all in this together" became a catch-cry.

The efforts made by our governments have demanded that we be self-disciplined and prepared to make the sacrifices for the sake of those vulnerable to COVID-19. The more recent generations have never had to face such a crisis or to pay the heavy personal cost of having our freedoms curtailed. At least in Australia, the potential harm of the coronavirus to the whole population has been greatly reduced by decisive action taken by governments and supported by the people.

Among the things we have learnt has been that we are vulnerable and not immune. We are not really in control, nor do we have all the answers. But, positively, we have learnt that we can keep the needs and plight of others in view, and we can freely respond to their needs.



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There are many aspects of the Christmas story that we will reflect upon as we approach this joyous festival. One is how Mary and Joseph looked desperately for a place to stay in Bethlehem. A kindness was shown to them when they were allowed to use a shelter that would have been used by shepherds, possibly not much more than a small cavern in the ground, where men and animals would find protection through the night.

Whatever it was, it was a place on the periphery of the town, at the edge. It was to be that the family - Mary, Joseph and the new born Jesus - was to be found at the outskirts. Their family was in need and desperate.

Pope Francis reminds us that the Church has to go to and be at the outskirts. The Christian community always needs to look beyond itself to see the plight and struggle of those living on the edge. This is where we are called to go and respond as best we can to the many needs of people. We must be prepared to be surprised when we find Jesus Christ there.

May our Catholic communities celebrate with renewed joy the great gift from the Father in the sending of the Son to live among us. I pray that His Spirit strongly unite us in our faith communities, enable us to keep in view those who are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and grant us the courage to respond.

Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Donald G Sproxton VG
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