



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

December 20, 2024

Dear Reader:

Winter's chill is felt in many ways. Fewer hours of daylight result in a drop in temperature and the lowered UV index results in the fading of summer tans. Wearing added layers of clothing is uncomfortable and makes movement a little clumsy. Staying indoors where it might be more comfortable is a pretty sure pledge of gaining winter weight. The course of time and the somewhat distant approach of Spring is what makes "snow birds" fly away and the "locals" feel the unmistakable loss.

In our Catholic Faith we recognize these very human reactions to the unchanging rhythm of life. Born into the world's brightening and fading light we appreciate the Christian teaching that we are reborn and share the Light of "the One in whom there is no darkness." If we are willing to live as He taught and persevere in faith and good works especially when the world seems dark and cold, we can't help but be warmed and give to the world a deeper warmth that isn't fleeting, but warms a cold heart to beat with the merciful love of Jesus Christ who came to drive out the spirit of eternal darkness and isolation.

As the winter solstice will mark the earth's gradual turning toward a new season of light and warmth for us, so does our Catholic Faith look forward to the Second Coming of Jesus who came among us as an infant and will come again, but will herald the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth where the glory of the Lord will surround His Faithful with unblemished love, justice, peace fulfilling the Beatific Vision: looking upon the very Face of God without fear and rapt in ultimate happiness.

The cause of our celebration at Christmas is the realization that the Divine Presence is in our midst already and in His humanity and divinity Jesus empowers us to choose, experience and share this truth.

Pope Francis has recognized our earthly life as a pilgrimage of hope. This has always been the case, of course, but our Catholic Church has maintained a cyclical living of faith and prayer and good works (our Liturgical Cycle) that is repeated each year to challenge the burdensome effects of materialism and the confusing indecisiveness of relativism. By faith in God's wisdom and our self-gift in return, the virtue of hope encourages us to challenge feelings of the anguish of discouragement by recalling Christ's promises kept and His promise yet to come.

In the Old Testament, the Holy and Just Job professed, “I believe that my redeemer lives, and on the last day I shall rise from the dust and in my flesh I shall see my God and savior. My very self shall see Him; my own eyes shall gaze on Him.” At Christmas we see the Lord in flesh while His very self sees us; His own eyes gaze on us. As an infant is captivated by the presence of others, so is Christ Jesus drawn to love and rejoice in what he sees in human beings as children of God – His own family to whom He is entrusted on earth!

And so, in the midst of winter’s chill we are reminded that right now we are, together, on a Pilgrimage of Hope.

On Tuesday, December 24, Christmas Eve, Pope Francis will inaugurate a Holy Year of Jubilee and re-open the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica announcing that this Holy Year of Jubilee is to be known and recognized as A PILGRIMAGE of HOPE. May this Christmas and the coming New Year herald what is so often repeated and proclaimed: “Peace on Earth and Good Will to all.”

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Libasci", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci, D.D.
Bishop of Manchester