



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

### BISHOP LIBASCI'S 2019 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Many of you will not remember the Advent Seasons of old, but I do remember because I lived them! Four weeks of penance preceded the great joy of Christmas. The penances were fairly simple, but demanded our attention and thoughtfulness. They were ways in which our Roman Catholic Church helped us to prepare our interior being – our intellect and will, our very soul, to receive the best gift, the unseen but deeply felt gift of the Prince of Peace.

For example, during Advent we limited our intake of food, especially meat, and had to pay attention to meals that would nourish us but not encourage overeating. We also changed our habits of listening to music and instead of some other choices, we were encouraged to listen to – or better yet, sing together – simpler songs. We did shop for Christmas gifts, but you have to remember that back when I was a boy, you only bought clothes for Christmas, Easter, the new school year and birthdays. By those times, we usually really needed those things; we hadn't yet invented the phrase, "when the going gets tough the tough go shopping" because it wasn't what we did in those days; we hadn't learned to become a "throw-away society," but held on to and learned how to fix or mend things so they would last longer (a great money saver!)

Our Advent reminded us to share what we had and buy gifts that would be worn or eaten. In this way we accepted that this world has its blessings but they are not the great blessing of eternal life: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life" (John's Gospel, chapter 3, verse 16). I believe it was through such little spiritual exercises of our faith that we were culturally able to deal a little bit better with disappointment and the pain that is inevitably part of human and even animal life. We were encouraged to give the best we could, knowing that God who is love itself would be glorified in our thoughts, words and deeds toward everyone on earth.

That world seems to have been rejected, doesn't it? Sin is becoming more and more apparent and more and more horrifying. It is hard to believe, but Saint Paul knew this same kind of a world back in his day. He himself had a violent nature. But when he found faith through the community of believers he was able to swear, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more!" He himself came to know Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace crucified and risen. He knew the human and divine nature of Jesus loving all, even His enemies.

Advent isn't culturally lived the way it was when I was a boy. Christmas isn't lived culturally the way it was when I was a boy. But to live these holy seasons personally and in a small faith community open to the grace of which St. Paul spoke we can prepare our interior being – our intellect and will, our very soul – to receive the best gift, the unseen but deeply felt gift of the Prince of Peace. And this gift was given to us by God Himself to be re-gifted again and again for the life and salvation of the world.

By the time you read this, Advent will have just about passed. That's all right. Maybe just some of these thoughts can light a small Christmas candle to light the way of the soul to meet the Prince of Peace in this Christmas season and the new year with a new hope, the Hope that is Christ.

A blessed Christmas, everyone!

*Glory to God in the highest and to people on earth peace and good will.*