



For all things give thanks.

1 THESS 5:18

Renewed hope.

BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD'S PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR CHRISTMAS 2020

To my Sisters and Brothers in Christ

At the start of this pandemic, as a diocese we looked to the ancient wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures to provide us with inspiration to guide our response. The book of Sirach (38:12–13) reminded us that there will be times when we have to place our trust in experts such as physicians. As I reflect on what has been a most difficult time for our diocese and broader community across the world, I am deeply grateful for the commitment and resolve of our clergy and parish communities to keep each other safe through implementing all that has been asked of us by health experts. This truly reflects the love of God. And I acknowledge it has come, at times, with great sacrifice through not being able to visit sick and dying family, extended periods of isolation and a significant alteration to our liturgical life.

As I write this in the final days leading to Christmas, I am reminded that we must be a people renewed and full of hope. St Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

“May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to the full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the heritage he offers among his people.....”

These words are particularly powerful to me as they, in many ways, remind me of why we celebrate this feast of Christmas. We have been included in the heritage

of God through the birth of his Son into our world. We have been claimed by God to dwell with the richness of God's life. These are the things that have been revealed to us, and this is where our eyes are opened to look upon the hope of God especially as we continue to live the experience of this Pandemic, with its uncertainties and its possibilities.

In *Frutelli Tutti* on “Fraternity and Social Friendship”, Pope Francis speaks to us of hope with a reflection on the pandemic:

54. Despite these dark clouds, which may not be ignored, I would like in the following pages to take up and discuss many new paths of hope. For God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family. The recent pandemic enabled us to recognize and appreciate once more all those around us who, in the midst of fear, responded by putting their lives on the line. We began to realize that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious... They understood that no one is saved alone.

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55. I invite everyone to **renewed hope**, for hope “speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”. Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope. (Fratelli Tutti)

We therefore have a responsibility to continually look towards God not just today, but on all days for he who is called Emmanuel, the name which means, God is with us, is truly with us at all times and all places. My prayer is that your eyes may be opened to see the wonder of God present to you, especially at this time when so many are afraid and concerned and suffering.

As the pandemic will undoubtedly continue to impact us for some time, we remain a people of hope and I ask you to continue to pray with me for an end to this pandemic and a return to health, peace and security.

Finally, I acknowledge all the frontline workers who are placed at risk to protect our communities and I am especially grateful to our clergy, religious, parish staff and countless parish volunteers who work tirelessly to maintain our liturgical life under strict rules designed to protect the community and the most vulnerable.

May God’s blessings be upon you and your families and may the Christ child be born in us again so that we can radiate that love and hope of our God to all the world.

I wish everyone a Holy and Safe Christmas and my prayer for us is to be a community of hope for 2021. I call all of us to live in the wonder of the gift of Christmas: each of us is loved by God. The power of this gift to transform our world is our hope.

Yours in Christ

+ Brian Mascord

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ARTWORK: *The Adoration of the Shepherds* by CHARLES LE BRUN (1619–1690). Oil on canvas, 151 × 213 cm. Musee du Louvre, Paris France. Public Domain

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