

Christmas Message from Bishop Ger Nash.

As a Clare man looking forward to his first Christmas in Wexford, I can think of no better way to extend Christmas greetings than the opening words of the Enniscorthy, or Wexford Carol:

*Good people all this Christmas time
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done
In sending us his beloved son.*

In its entirety this lovely traditional carol is full of the love and hope that Christ's birth continues to bring to the world. It is my sincere wish that the love and hope of the first Christmas will be realised in your Christmas and spill over into the New Year.

The Continuing Presence of the Pandemic

As our year draws to a close, we need hope as the pandemic continues to be a threat to health. The past year saw great inconveniences in terms of lockdowns and restrictions in all our lives and they tried our patience. Yet we know that all sacrifices pale in comparison to the pain endured by those who lost loved ones to the virus. Added to their grief was the reality that they were unable to mourn their loved ones in the normal public way alongside family, friends and community. Those who were so affected by the pandemic and those who contracted the virus and recovered are uppermost in my thoughts and prayers this Christmas time.

We all accept that frontline workers in various departments, professions and in the service industries are the backbone of our Covid response. I respectfully take it on myself to thank them for all they have done and continue to do in giving wholeheartedly to caring for all of us throughout the pandemic. The frontline workers have exemplified the best of community action and shown us how in times of crisis human beings can indeed rise to the occasion and flourish despite adversity. Their efforts are love and hope in action.

No one is unaffected by the pandemic, and I do not make light of anyone's personal sacrifice in terms of freedoms denied us: travel, attendance at religious events, large social gatherings and sports events, children curtailed in the freedom to be children, older and retired people who felt more isolated and lonelier. Covid-19 asked all of us to pay a price and in paying the price many people showed great resilience. It was a resilience that gave rise to people reaching out to others with great compassion and care. Once again love and hope came to the fore in an almost accidental and spontaneous manner as people responded to others' needs – this is to be praised and encouraged to continue.

Walking Together on a New Pathway

You will have heard something about Synodality – walking together - in recent months and you will be hearing much more about it in the year ahead. Briefly, Pope Francis has called for a new conversation to take place within the Catholic Church in order that we might find new ways of being God's people at this time and place and into the future. Your local Church (diocese and parish) is in synodal mode and this means a definite effort is underway to find this new way for the Church. It will involve

talking and listening to one another as Christ's people whose faith is leading them on life's journey.

I invite you to join in the conversation in whatever form it will take place in your own local community. I urge you to respect the right of everyone to share their views and the right too of expressing diverging views. It is my wish that we speak and listen to one another in a respectful manner so that a new pathway may emerge for us to walk on together as sisters and brothers of Christ. For my part as a new Bishop, I pledge myself to a year of deep listening to all the people of the Diocese of Ferns.

Christmas is for Everyone

We are about to celebrate Christmas the feast of Christ's birthday. It is much more than a birthday that we might celebrate with the appropriate number of candles on a cake. We celebrate the birth of Christ which marked the tremendous event of God's Mystery entering humanity's story by taking on the same flesh and blood as us. We celebrate Christ's birth for the hope it brought to the world that despite our human frailty we too are given a promise of everlasting life.

There are echoes of the first Christmas in our world today. There were bureaucratic annoyances, poverty, disease and restrictions facing Mary and Joseph. It was more a lockout than lockdown as the inn with no room gave way to a homeless birth in a stable. Bethlehem of the first Christmas has a timeless quality that speaks the same message of hope and love to people today. When we exchange greetings and gifts this Christmas and Santa brings gifts to children we are all in our own way unwrapping the gifts of hope and love that were given to the world on the first Christmas in Bethlehem.

The hope and love of Christmas inspire us every year to prayerfully remember all our deceased relatives and friends. We pray too for those who are recently bereaved as Christmas can be such a difficult time for them.

May the Christ-Child of Bethlehem bless all of us and focus our minds to:

*Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done
In sending us his beloved son.*

I wish everyone a happy Christmas and a safe and healthy New Year.

+ Ger Nash