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No. 244/2019

CHRISTMAS PASTORAL OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF THE USA TO OUR CLERGY, RELIGIOUS, SEMINARIANS AND BELOVED FAITHFUL

Christ is born!

These days we have a lot on our minds. Schoolchildren are being graded, high schoolers have college applications, college students just completed their exams and papers. All await the results. Adults are considering year-end family or professional budgets and December expenses—hoping to somehow come out ahead. And we all wonder: What was *really* accomplished during the past year? Gleeful on the outside but exhausted on the inside. The “Holiday Season” is upon us.

The global political atmosphere is supercharged: famine and mass killings in Yemen, wars on different continents, with the persecution of Christians, other religions, and minorities in many countries. The ongoing invasion of Ukraine, trade wars, the apparent unraveling of the European Union and western culture, in general, coming apart. The world seems bereft of global leaders with political vision and moral authority. And to all this, we might add conflicts in families and among friends that become particularly visible during the season when we are supposed to be together and happy.

There are indicators that depression, addictions, and suicides are on the rise in the American population. Objective and subjective causes of anxiety abound: the absence of a moral compass, aggression in music and movies, immigration and refugee crises, poverty, the climate. Many among us are dislocated, bewildered, and sad. Much in society is coming unglued. Things are not going that well in the Church...

There is much to mull over. Often our minds are overwhelmed by the flood of technologically generated and disseminated information, by sensationalized and polarized news. It is increasingly difficult to foster profound relations when communication and interaction are increasingly virtual, more “screen to screen” than “heart to heart.”

Even the good news of Christmas is filtered through the media and colored by conflicts and controversies.

In the midst of all this, it is essential to remind ourselves what Christmas is really about.

The Nativity of the Lord begs to interrupt and distract us from our anxiety and alienation in the most gentle and vulnerable way. It could not be more humble, hidden, or human.

The Son of God came into a world that was far from neat, peaceful, or welcoming. Jesus was not born in a royal palace, as we sing in one of our beloved Christmas carols. He immediately met cold misery in a foul, infested cave. Herod's bloody violence against children led Joseph and Mary to flee with the newborn Babe as refugees to a foreign land. The homeless Christ, Jesus the refugee, the helpless Infant pursued by a tyrant is in full solidarity with our human suffering and loneliness—from day one! God is with us—you and me. He will *never* abandon us as we seek to live in holiness, dignity, and mutual love. "For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My loving-kindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken," Says the Lord who has compassion on you (Isa 54:10)".

The appeal and proposal that comes to us in an Innocent Child could not be gentler. God's Word becomes a man. The Son of God dwells among us, in this world with all of its beauty and challenge (John 1:14).

The Lord could not be any closer to our human experience. He comes to us in a shepherd's cave, inconspicuously, far from home... for all of us, for our salvation. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk 19:10).

The first to see Him were simple folks — the shepherds (Lk 2:8-20). Those called by Biblical prophecy to pay homage — came from afar (Matt 2:1-12). Others — out of jealousy, fear, and ambition — sought to kill Him (Matt 2:16-18). But most of humanity noticed nothing at all. How blessed we are to know, to see, to hear (Matt 13:16), to celebrate the Emmanuel — God is with us (Matt 1:23). "What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:31-32).

This Christmas we wish all of you a deeply personal experience of God's presence in your life, in your families and communities. We wish you the abiding tranquility that comes from a sense that God is near. A peace experienced by the shepherds who heard angels singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Lk 2:14).

However, we would like to wish you much more. We hope that you can carry the news of the Birth of Jesus to others. Through your hospitality, generosity, mercy, through your carols and good word. For "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3-4). And yet the Scripture says: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (Rom 10:15).

We propose that this Christmas we all sit down and attentively read the Nativity narrative (Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 1:18-2:18). Let us do so quietly, in our homes, with an icon and candle, with the starlit sky shining through the window, reading alone or with those dear to our heart.

Let us reflect on the mystery of a God who becomes one of us, and share with others what we see and hear. When we share, our joy doubles. When we bring encouragement to those who might be sad, their sadness is cut in half.

The Mother of God was called to carry the Word of God in her womb and to give birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem. Joseph carried the Infant to safety in Egypt. We are called to carry His Salvation to our sisters and brothers — by our peace, by our love, by the way we relate to those with whom we live and work.

This Christmas we wish for you that your family, your profession, your efforts, your rest and relaxation may be permeated with the joy of the Nativity, no matter what your situation might be — material or spiritual.

We have been given much. We have received God Himself in our lives! Having received, let us give to others so that peace and joy may reign on this earth.

We remain your humble servants in the newborn Messiah,

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Christmas 2019