



DIOCESE OF PAISLEY

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First Sunday of Advent 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Watching for the Day of Great Promise in which now we dare to hope.

As our Advent Season begins, I want to encourage you with the assurance of my closeness to you in prayer, to your parish communities and to your loved ones, as our diocesan family takes up our spiritual preparation for Christmas.

The Preface for our Advent Masses reminds us of how the LORD Jesus, in His first coming two thousand years ago, *assumed the lowliness of human flesh* in order to *fulfil the design His Father formed long ago* and so, in His humble way, to *open for us the way to eternal salvation*.

In the latter part of Advent and into Christmas time, our Crib scenes and Christmas Carols will remind us of just how difficult this first coming into our world of the LORD proved to be: for Him, for His Mother Mary and for Her Spouse Saint Joseph.

We will remember how public control measures at that time, in the form of a census, had broken into the ordinary daily routines of their lives that they would have, till then, taken for granted. For the Holy Family it meant the birth of their Child Jesus in some make-shift arrangement on the margins of the little town of Bethlehem. Far from home, Mary and Joseph were not able to share the joy of their new born Child with their extended family, who must have longed to hold Him in their arms, but who were at just too considerable a physical distance back home in Nazareth to make it possible. Soon their hopes of a quick return home to normality would be dashed by the further threat of King Herod, who reigned like a frightening plague across the whole country of Judea.

Yet, for all that, the birth of the Messiah was the happiest of moments for the Holy Family; a bright light shining in their lives *that the darkness could not put out*; a moment, in the sadness and anxiety all around, of *gladness and hope*.



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All of this is summed up in the lovely Christmas Carol, *O Holy Night* which reminds us of how; *The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger. In all our trials born to be our friend. Thus it encourages us of how: He knows our need and to our weakness is no stranger. This, indeed, is our Christmas King; before Whom we lowly bend!*

In the first part of Advent, from today until 16 December, we look forward to the LORD's Second Coming *to judge the living and the dead*. Then, we know He will *come again in glory and majesty*. In this blessed Coming *all will be at last made manifest*: the redemptive meaning of all the sufferings we offered up to GOD throughout our lives, the injustices we bore for the sake of the Kingdom of GOD, either as a Church family or in our own personal histories. All will be made clear and make sense, and all of those sacrifices we offered up with good hearts will be revealed in all their astounding fruitfulness. Somehow, every cross offered up in union with the LORD's will have proved worthwhile.

And so *we watch for that day!* That is to say, we set our sights on it, we long for it in our hearts, and we orientate our lives to that happy Day when, sufferings over, we will *inherit the great promise in which we now dare to hope*.

This year we will live our Advent and Christmas Season in something like the way the Baby Jesus, His Mother Mary and Saint Joseph lived through their first Christmas. The Gospel tells us that all of it, the trials and the wonders, the joys and sorrows, Mary *pondered and treasured in Her heart* while Saint Joseph simply *did what GOD told him to do* through the message of the Angel Gabriel.

They knew in faith that this little Child named Jesus would *save the world from our sins* and that was all that mattered: called Emmanuel, He was the living and breathing truth that *GOD is with us*, having kept to His promise which He made long ago, and that was more than enough cause for joy and celebration.

As we prepare to celebrate a GOD Who knew how to keep His Word and provide safely and surely for the Holy Family of Nazareth, I hope we can trust in Him to look after our world in these similarly perturbed times. I trust, too, that it gives us sure hope that the LORD will come again, as He said He would, and find us longing for His arrival in our hearts, alert in faith and wide awake in hope.

Maranatha! Come LORD Jesus.

With the assurance of blessings and prayers.

+ John