

**2020 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FOR EWTN OF
HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As Apostolic Nuncio, in the name of the Holy Father, I want to wish you and your loved ones a blessed and peace-filled Christmas. I wish to express the personal closeness and spiritual affection of Pope Francis, assuring you of his prayers during this holy season in which we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

The joy proclaimed in this season may appear to be in sharp contrast to the year we have just experienced, one marked not only by civil unrest, but also by much suffering during the coronavirus pandemic. The suffering experienced has not been a mere physical suffering; rather, it has been an emotional and spiritual one, symptomatic of a society influenced by suspicions about the ultimate substance, meaning and fulfillment of our lives.

Consequently, many people have lived this year in fear – fear of the virus and of an uncertain future. Others have become lethargic, particularly during the lockdowns, refusing to engage with the reality of what has taken place. Still others have felt powerless to do anything during the crisis, believing that their efforts cannot make a difference.

Perhaps, this is how people felt while awaiting the Messiah, with the burden of sin and the yoke of their Roman oppressors weighing heavily upon them. Yet, there were some who held out hope and cried out: *O that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence* (Is 64:1).

Yes, even today, people cry out for the Presence of the Lord who comes to save His people. We must truly seek the face of the Lord, rather than stare into the face of meaninglessness. The English Christmas Carol captures the situation: *In the bleak mid-winter/Frosty wind made moan/Earth stood hard as iron/Water like a stone/Snow had fallen, snow on snow/Snow on snow/In the bleak mid-winter/Long ago.*

There are some who refuse to acknowledge the present suffering. One group presents intellectual arguments trying to explain away what is happening or trying to hide it, but these explanations rarely inspire people to break out of a slumber or lethargy. Some want to cope with feelings of uncertainty by believing that if they just follow the rules and stay within limits, they can at least have some order in their lives. But is that any way to go through life? Still others think that we need to reduce our desire or to lower expectations about what is possible in life, given all that has happened. It is a type of resignation, which surrenders one's dreams.

But the poor shepherds of Saint Luke's Gospel were not resigned. They were not intellectuals to be persuaded by lofty arguments. They were not mere rule followers, though they worked hard to survive. They did not reduce their desires but had real hope. When the angel of the Lord appeared to them with a great announcement – *“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* – and cried out

to them "*Glory to God in the highest*" (cf. Luke 2:10-14), they made haste to Bethlehem to see the newborn child.

They had a simple faith and great hope. They refused to give up on their dream of a Messiah. Upon seeing the Child, His mother Mary, and Joseph, they were filled with joy. The burdens of their lives seemed to dissipate, and they went home rejoicing, glorifying God. In the mystery of the Incarnation, God did rend the heavens and come down, and the earth was wrapped in wonder at His Presence.

God did not come in power and majesty, but He came as a Child, whose tender gaze pierced the hearts of the shepherds and helped them to experience being truly loved. It was the love of this Child that made them feel valued and helped them to carry on in hope and joy. This was the Presence of God in the Flesh.

Tertullian famously wrote: "*Caro salutis cardo*"- *The flesh is the hinge of salvation*. God came in the flesh to save us. It is this Presence in the flesh that saves us from sliding into nothingness, hopelessness, and despair. The shepherds encountered God in the flesh and their humanity was changed. Like them, this Child gives us hope. His Presence makes things new, and it is this newness that attracts. The newborn King had become the true criterion for gladness and peace.

It is true even in our day. If God became flesh, then His Presence remains in the Flesh in His Mystical Body, the Church, who is also a mother, calling her children back to the reality of things. She reminds her children that we need to depend on God. During the current crisis, we have learned that we are not in control. We need a Savior. Conscious of our dependence on God and grounded in Him, the weight of these days does not crush us; rather, starting from Christ, the Son of Mary, everything appears different, everything appears new.

This newborn Child will not cheat us or lead us into despair. He will show us what it means to live in a way that is human, true, and beautiful. Our mission in this world is to share the hope and newness of this Child: to encounter men and women and to bring them into a deeper relationship with His Presence, a Presence which saves and offers peace, a Presence which makes things new.

May the Christ Child bring this newness of life to you and your families, filling you with joy and peace throughout this holy season and in the New Year.