



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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Pastoral Letter

Feast of the Holy Family

26th December 2021

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we continue our celebration of Christmas with the Feast of the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Only yesterday the promise of the Father was fulfilled in the birth of his Son who took on our humanity so as to show us the way to the Father and take away the sins of the world. Christmas Day is a day like no other in that through the birth of Jesus men and women are offered a new life and vision which makes possible eternal life. In his Gospel, Saint John reminds us of the necessity of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ– “God so loved the world that He sent His only Son” and that love continues in the midst of human confusion and suffering. The fact that God took on our human nature gives us courage in time of need and strength in our difficulties. We know that as God has shared our human condition, he accompanies us throughout our lives and teaches us through the Holy Spirit to respond to his merciful love.

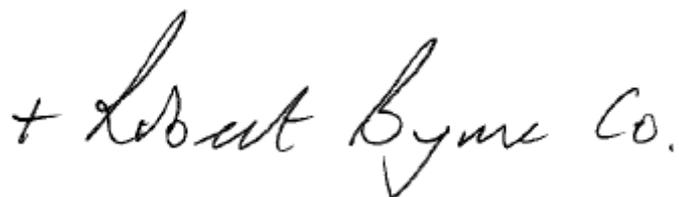
The past year has been challenging for all of us, and continues to be so still. I know that the pandemic has caused considerable distress for many of us. At the same time, we have discovered new ways of living, many of which will continue after the pandemic is over. Travelling around the Diocese I have heard how grateful many have been for the online streaming of Masses and for the opportunities made available for us to pray together in different ways. This is a form of what Pope St John-Paul called the “domestic Church”. The Lord promised us that where two or three are gathered in his name he would be in the midst of them. What better way to start than within our family circle! This is the reality of Christ present in the midst of our families as we gather together to

pray and to intercede for our needs. Many families have witnessed a new discovering of family life, family meals, and time spent together during the days of lockdown. There are also wonderful stories of families reaching out with social action to the elderly, lonely and vulnerable in their neighbourhoods. Let us joyfully take hold of the treasures we have discovered together, gifts from the Lord. It is never too late to begin to pray together as a family. Perhaps you might start by reading together a part of the scriptures and reflecting on how it speaks to you and then turn your reflection into a prayer. There are many other ways of praying, such as the Rosary, but whatever you decide to do you will be putting Christ at the centre of your family life and he will inevitably transform you. You can find resources and ideas on our diocesan website. We take as our model of family life the Holy Family, in which each played their unique part in God's plan but all were united to the Father through prayer and their love for each other. Pray to the Holy Family today for your own family.

Our diocesan Eucharistic Year continues and our love of Christ in the Eucharist will bring us together in ever greater unity as Christ's followers. It is through the Holy Eucharist that we encounter God himself: his truth, his beauty and his goodness. Moreover, it is the Eucharist which strengthens us to reach out to others, especially those who are suffering or on the margins of society. As the shepherds and wise men encountered the Child Jesus in the crib, so we continue to encounter him in the Eucharist. And this is a great gift for which we can be truly thankful.

As I celebrate Mass during this Christmas Season, I will bring you, your families, and your loved ones before the Lord. I wish you all a very happy Christmas and every blessing for the New Year.

Yours devotedly in Christ



✠ Rt Rev Robert Byrne CO
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