



Christmas Message, December 2024
His Eminence Frank Cardinal Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Praised be Jesus Christ.

Christmas is a wonderful time that provides us with a unique and blessed occasion of grace to contemplate the immensity and graciousness of **God's love for us** and the **hope** and **joy** which this love brings to our lives. The mystery of the Incarnation - which we celebrated nine months ago on March 25th at the Annunciation - has now culminated in the birth of the child Jesus, the Prince of Peace: God becoming man out of love for us. We remember also how that same unconditional love of the Word made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14-18), invades the world as we know it with a **peace** that transcends all understanding (cf. Phil 4:7). Jesus Christ himself, and no other, is the **light** that scatters the darkness of our lives, our relationships and communities and imbues them with newness of life if only we let him into our hearts through faith and surrender to that love which knows no end and no limitations.

We celebrate the Birth of Christ among us, in our human flesh, in our world. Though he was "*born of the Father before all ages and through whom all things were made*", yet he was born in time, in Bethlehem, of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary; he was given birth in our very own wounded world; he is one of us, one like us in all ways, except sin. He comes to us from the heights and the glory of Paradise where he existed together with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity, adored and praised by the multitude of the heavenly hosts. He leaves the loftiness of Heaven to descend among us and become like us, born in our midst to walk among us as a friend, a brother, a companion, a teacher, a Saviour, our God in the flesh.

Now why exactly did he do that? Our faith gives us a number of reasons:

First, **he did it in order to save us by reconciling us with God** (Cf. CCC #457). As we know, from the time of original sin to this day, humanity finds itself – we find ourselves – journeying amidst shadows and lights, with sin being, most regrettably, a part of our human condition. Original sin, our personal sins, social sins – all of this amounts to a dire situation requiring a Saviour to rescue us, to save us. And so, the Father of all mercies, out of his immense and unsurpassed love for each of us and because we really needed to be saved from darkness and everlasting death, gave up His very own Son, the Beloved, the Begotten from eternity, to be our personal Saviour and that of the whole world. We are saved by the Lord from sin, Satan and the evil in its many facets. He came down to us so as to reconcile us to himself. **That is why we need to ask ourselves: In my life, and at this Christmas time, am I ready to acknowledge my sins humbly and truthfully and surrender to the Lord Jesus who came precisely to save me?**

Second, **he did it to show us God's Love and that we come to know and experience that love** (Cf. CCC #458). Being all powerful and all knowing, all just and all merciful, after original sin and rejection, rather than abandoning humanity to its own demise, He reached out to us out of his immense love. God, who is Love, ultimately never gives up on us; he keeps on reaching out, offering us yet another chance, another opportunity to make things right. He is always there on the horizon, ready to love and to be loved by us. He became man so we may truly come to know in our own personal existence his infinite, everlasting love for each of us. **Let us ask ourselves during this Christmas season: how do I welcome God's love in my life and how do I share it with others?**

Third, he came down from heaven to **be our model of holiness, that is, to teach us the art of living** (Cf. CCC #459). We are called to holiness, to become saints. He is our teacher, and role model; he taught us by

example and by his preaching how to live lives pleasing to the Lord, in imitation to Christ. Holiness is our final goal; all of us are called, regardless of our state, particular vocation and situation – all of us are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. Jesus told his disciples and tells us today: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat 5:48) and he himself is our truth and our life, but also our way (cf. John 14:6). We always and firstly look to Jesus so as to model our life after his. **We can ask ourselves truthfully at this point: am I convinced that I am called to live a holy life, emulating that of Jesus, in my daily living?**

And finally, the Incarnation took place in order to **adopt us his children, in other words**, "the Word became flesh" - to make us '**partakers of the divine nature**' (Cf. CCC #460). In fact, Our Lord Jesus did not intend to lead us back to the earthly paradise that Adam and Eve lost due to their disobedience and sin; his end game, his desire is to lead us back to his own home in Heaven; he wants to share with us for all eternity his very own life which he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is not merely being admitted into the bliss of eternal life; it is God's own life which is poured into our souls, making us his adopted children and members of his family. **We can ask ourselves: Am I striving to live a life of faith by which I enjoy daily the joys and blessing of belonging to the Lord as a member of his household family? Do I benefit from the graces of the Sacraments which channel to us God's divine life and love?**

Dear friends, this year our Christmas celebrations are informed by the **Jubilee Year** which Pope Francis launched and invites us to share, inspired by the theme "Pilgrims of Hope". Jubilee Years ordinarily happen every twenty-five years and are meant to be a time of great spiritual renewal and reconciliation. Our Holy Father announced the Jubilee expressing his desire that "the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the "door" (cf. Jn 10:7-9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as "our hope" (1 Tim 1:1) (*Spes non Confundit*, 1).

Christmas calls forth from us that genuine personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. At Christmas we come face-to-face with the Incarnate love of God, a love that is dynamic and life-changing. In parishes across the Archdiocese of Toronto, Nativity scenes are set up and people come in prayerful adoration of the child Jesus in the manger. They gaze into the face of Love Incarnate. The transformative love of God always looks to build up, never to tear down; to give life, never to destroy. We are God's beloved and the real miracle of Christmas is that Jesus was born so that we might have eternal life.

My hope and prayer for the Archdiocese of Toronto is that we embrace the call of our Holy Father to be *Pilgrims of Hope*; that we journey together and proclaim Jesus Christ to a world in need of His love. On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis inaugurates the Jubilee Year with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, and asked that on December 29, in cathedrals around the world, a holy Mass be celebrated as a solemn opening of the Jubilee Year in each diocese. His Holiness will be celebrating at his cathedral, St. John Lateran, in union with diocesan bishops around the world (*Spes non Confundit*, 6). Here in the Archdiocese of Toronto, I will be presiding over a Eucharistic celebration at St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica on December 29. I invite all of us to join in that Mass in union with all other dioceses around the world in giving witness to that hope and love which comes from the heart of the Saviour. What a beautiful sign of the unity and catholicity of the Church it will be.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, as you gather for the Christmas meal and exchange gifts; as you participate in Christmas Mass, the eve or the day; as you reach out to family and friends, neighbours and those who are in need: think of the **gift** that you can be and are called to be to others. Be that gift of love and reconciliation; of peace and good will to those around you.

Happy and Blessed Christmas to you and your loved ones.

Yours Sincerely in Jesus with Mary,



Frank Cardinal Leo

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