

ST. BONIFACE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE
2021



Each year, the Holy Father addresses the cares and concerns of the whole, worldwide Church with his *Urbi et Orbi* message. While I would never presume to be anywhere near as important as the pope, in these troubled times, as we prepare to begin a new year, I feel it is important for me as your pastor to address the cares and concerns of all the people of St. Boniface, especially those who are unable or unwilling for health reasons to return to in-person participation at parish Masses, and our Faith Formation families, who have not been able to gather in-person for two months due to COVID.

Personally, I do not fear COVID. I have visited many of our parishioners in the COVID wings of hospitals and COVID patients in their homes, and, sadly, I have also celebrated the funerals of parishioners who have died from COVID. I do not write this as someone who does not understand the seriousness of the disease, nor do I write it hoping that you think I'm some kind of hero or martyr. I write this as a concerned pastor who tries his best to be there for his people when they need him, and if you or a loved one is suffering from COVID and needs pastoral care, please do not hesitate to contact me.

After two years living under the shadow of this deadly pandemic, though, I will tell you what I do fear. I fear that some of our parish family has been away so long, they have forgotten their way home. I fear that as more and more time goes by, I will begin to forget their faces and names, and they mine. I fear that we are losing an entire generation, not by death, but by absence due to the fear of death. I fear that I have failed you as your pastor because I have not inspired in you a faith that overcomes fear with the bold proclamation of the truth: Jesus Christ is risen, and death has no more power over us. Not that we will never die, or get sick, or suffer, but that we who believe in Christ will pass through sickness, suffering, and death to the fullness of life that only faith in him can bring.

But this is a Christmas message, and Christmas is not a season of fear, but of hope. So let me tell you of my hope. I hope that in the new year those who have stayed away due to COVID will return and that our parish family will once again be whole. I hope that not only will we remember each other but that we will remember our parish's mission and invite others to join us as well. I hope that the younger generation will forgive us for teaching them to fear instead of teaching them to have faith and that my failures as your pastor will not prevent you from knowing the life-transforming love and power of our God.

But hope without a foundation is merely wishful thinking, so let me conclude by telling you the reason for my hope. I have hope because 2000 years ago, in a backward corner of the world, in the tiny town of Bethlehem, a helpless baby was born to impoverished parents, wrapped in rags, and laid in a feeding trough for a crib. Yet, despite that utterly hopeless situation, his birth was greeted by hosts of angels, heralded by a star, hailed by royal visitors, and now, 2000 years later, celebrated by over a billion people as the defining event of human history. How does that happen if not by the work of God? Our God specializes in bringing something from nothing, life from death, hope from despair, and the incarnation and birth of Christ is the first stroke of his masterpiece.

My hope this Christmas season is that our celebration of the birth of Christ gives birth to a renewed faith in all our hearts that conquers fear, restores our parish family, reconnects us to one another, reengages our young people, and rekindles my own ministry. We have been hiding in the dark for too long. With the birth of Christ, the Dayspring from on high has shone upon us. May his birth drive away the darkness and lead us all to a new day of light, happiness, and peace, and on behalf of all of us at St. Boniface, may each and everyone of you have a very blessed and hope-filled Christmas.