

'CHRISTMAS CALLS US TO BE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE OPPRESSED'  
29 DECEMBER 2019

Let us begin by praying for life-giving rain in the many parts of Australia severely affected by drought and by bushfires.

*[pause and pray]*

### INTRODUCTION – THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

On the first Christmas,  
Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem.  
They had arrived safely.  
They had found shelter, even though it was with the animals;

Mary had given birth to Jesus, a healthy boy, and they have rejoiced.  
Mary and Joseph had witnessed the joy of the local shepherds  
and the wonder of the Magi, travelers from the East.

Having met those challenges and having found peace,  
we hear now of the terrorist acts of Herod.  
Into the Christmas story comes survival - surviving the evil of terrorism.

*In our stores leading up to Christmas,  
how many of us have seen and heard stories of Herod?*

The story is not good for sales in the stores and online.  
The story of Herod doesn't sell chocolates or clothing or other gifts.  
Yet in Matthew's Gospel, **it is a part of Christmas.**

### REMEMBERING TODAY

After wonderful Christmas celebrations in our parish community,  
we take time this weekend to remember  
**the terror that some people face daily,  
we ask what we can do for them in the coming year,  
and we pray for them.**

Whether **domestic violence** locally or overseas,  
whether living in fear of **local gangs** or **corrupt institutions**,  
whether in **war** or **armed conflicts**,  
**we name the terror in our world  
and the call to act for peace and justice.**

*Why do we name the issue during the Christmas season?*

Because the **Gospel names the terror that the Holy Family survived,  
by fleeing their country and seeking asylum in Egypt.**

Let us slowly read today's Gospel.

## GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 2;13-15, 19-23

*'Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'*

*Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'*

*When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.'*

*Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.*

*But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee.*

*There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'*

We also think back to the Exodus accounts in the Old Testament and the struggle of the Israelite people to find genuine religious freedom and liberation from fear and oppression and acts of terror.

## POPE FRANCIS MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY THIS CHRISTMAS

At Christmas the Pope traditionally gives a Christmas message of hope to the world, especially to peoples struggling in violent situations.

This year in his [Urbi Et Orbi](#) Message, Pope Francis reminds us:

- *'There is darkness in personal, family and social relationships, but the light of Christ is greater.'*
- *'There is darkness in economic, geopolitical and ecological conflicts, yet greater still is the light of Christ.'*

In Jesus Christ, Pope Francis invites us:

- *'May he bring his smile, through our poor faces, to all the children of the world: to those who are abandoned and those who suffer violence.'*

- *Through our frail hands, may he clothe those who have nothing to wear, give bread to the hungry and heal the sick.*
- *Through our friendship, such as it is, may he draw close to the elderly and the lonely, to migrants and the marginalized*
- *May he soften our often stony and self-centred hearts, and make them channels of his love*

This Christmas, Pope Francis highlights the humanitarian crises:

- *in the Middle East, particularly in the Holy Land; Syria, Iraq, Lebanon,*
- *in Africa and particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,*
- *Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.*
- *On the American continent, particularly in Venezuela*
- *Ukraine*
- *to all who suffer because of violence, natural disasters or outbreaks of disease*
- *to those who are persecuted for their religious faith, especially missionaries*
- *and members of the faithful who have been kidnapped,*
  - *and to the victims of attacks by extremist groups*
- *all those who, due to these and other injustices, are forced to emigrate in the hope of a secure life. It is injustice that makes them cross deserts and seas that become cemeteries. It is injustice that forces them to endure unspeakable forms of abuse, enslavement of every kind and torture in inhumane detention camps. It is injustice that turns them away from places where they might have hope for a dignified life, but instead find themselves before walls of indifference.*

## PRAYER

During the week ahead we are invited to pray for all who seek liberation from terror and fear.

And to add our own particular prayers.

## MY PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS | MY PERSONAL PRAYERS

For example, from my personal encounters on visiting PNG in early November, and in tune with the Pope's example of emigration above

- I add a prayer intention for justice and love for asylum seekers and refugees living in fear and experiencing psychological terror in detention in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, living under conditions set by Australia.
- And another prayer intention from that visit for West Papuans in exile in PNG

We add our own prayers.

***[pause]***

Let us find strength each day this coming week in this part of today's Second Reading from Colossians.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

*'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,  
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.  
Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another,  
forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

*Above all, clothe yourselves with love,  
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.  
And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,  
to which indeed you were called in the one body.  
And be thankful.*

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;  
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;  
and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.  
And whatever you do, in word or deed,  
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
giving thanks to God the Father through him.'*

Let us clothe ourselves in love.

May our smiles, our frail hands, our friendship, our hearts,  
be open to the oppressed, locally and internationally.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

[Readings: <https://universalis.com/20191229/mass.htm>]

Other references: [Pope Francis Urbi et Orbi message, Christmas 2019](#)

