



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Christmas 2019

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

One of the more significant traditions associated with Christmas is gift giving. Gifts are tokens of love and affection for others. One of the greatest gifts that God has given to us is the family and we see this most clearly when we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of St. Luke we are told that a group of shepherds is tending sheep at night and an angel appears telling them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10). When the angels had left the shepherds, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. They were not disappointed that they only found a simple family in a stable. They understood this profound truth – what seemed so ordinary was truly extraordinary.

The Holy Family was not rich or surrounded by comfort and material possessions. What they did have was profound love for one another and this created a sense of peace and security. Even though they had experienced difficulties and uncertainties, their faith in God did not waver. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, provide a model of family life for us all.

Due to the fact that we are so familiar with family life, we can so easily take it for granted. We forget that what seems so ordinary offers us something quite extraordinary. Parents become the first educators of their children with regard to faith and life. It is within the family that life and love are nurtured. Relationships are strengthened and trust is established. We learn what it means to live in community as family members relate to one another in a spirit of cooperation and respect. It seems self-evident that the greatest learning institution in the world is not a university or school; it is the human family. A gift that is both precious and fragile.

It has been said that "as the family goes, so goes the nation." This simple statement reminds us that families are the foundation of society. Today we know the many struggles that families face and that undue stress can cause them to break down. This has a profound impact on us all. What we need to do is support family life by helping each member grow in appreciation of this incredible gift from God that is both precious and fragile.

Christmas is a wonderful time to focus on the family and spend time together to create an environment that is filled with love and support. Let us turn to the Holy Family as a perfect example of what it means to be a father, mother, son or daughter. Let us celebrate the 'extraordinary' that is found in the ordinary. "So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger" (Luke. 2:16).

May you have a blessed Christmas and a grace-filled New Year.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.
Bishop of St. Catharines