

## ARHBISHOP JULIAN PORTEOUS 2020 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

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As the celebration of Christmas approaches the mood of the country is changing as COVID-19 border restrictions are eased and other government requirements are being relaxed. The mood of the country is lifting as people are able to return to many normal activities. There is no doubt that 2020 has been a very difficult year. Everyone has been affected by the efforts to limit the spread of the virus. There has been considerable human cost. Many people have been emotionally impacted by the various lockdown conditions. Family and friends have been unable to attend the funerals of loved ones. Marriage ceremonies have been postponed. Grandparents have been unable to share in the birth of a grandchild. These are all profound human experiences which make up the rich tapestry of human life.

This year has surely reminded all of us of how important our personal relationships are. It has highlighted the fact that we are interdependent and are nourished by the range of human relationships in our life. This inherently communal dimension of the human person in the end is grounded in the nature of God Himself. God is a communion of persons and having been made in his image and likeness we ourselves are by our nature drawn to communion, to relationship with others. One of the central features of the Church herself is her *communio* nature. Being a Catholic is much more than just belonging to an organisation or sharing a set of beliefs. We are, through our faith and the sacrament of baptism, spiritually united to one another. We are in fact, as St Paul teaches, parts of one body (see I Cor 12).

Our identity as Christians is grounded in Christ and through Christ we are made one with each other. We are all sons and daughters of the one Father in heaven; we have a common faith in Jesus Christ and He is our life; we share in the gift of the one Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Ephesians St Paul reminds us that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:5-6). We, as Catholics, have strong spiritual bonds that bind us to one another. As believers we need one another to support us on our pilgrimage in this world. The bonds that unite are stronger than the issues that may at times separate us. Christmas this year will be significant in many ways. It will bring joy to many who have suffered during the course of this year. It will bring hope for the future after the uncertainties of the past year. It is for each of us an opportunity to be reminded that God is always with us: Emmanuel. We have never been alone during this difficult time. Our faith in the Incarnation encourages us as we know that God is intimately engaged with all of humanity especially during its trials and sufferings.

The celebration of Christmas in our society is also a celebration of family life. In reflecting on the birth of Christ we are in fact reflecting on the Holy Family, and importance of families. It is the preeminent time for families to come together. For many families who have been separated during the course of the year, family gatherings or reunions will be much cherished. For us in the Church we are reminded of the blessing of being Christians together in the family of God. Christmas can be an occasion where we are reminded of the importance of fostering our unity and mutual love. We look to the year ahead as a time when we can continue to nourish those human and spiritual relationships which are vital to our life.

The Most Reverend Julian Porteous DD  
Archbishop of Hobart

13 December 2020