

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM FR STEVEN RIGO

Dear Parishioners of Sacred Heart, Diamond Creek, St. Mary's, Greensborough and St. Thomas, North Greensborough,

Back in 1992, the queen of England described the year for her and her family as an "annus horribilis", wrecked by the collapse of three of her children's marriages - including Prince Charles' to Princess Diana - and the fire that severely damaged her Windsor Castle home. The Latin term in English means "Horrible Year". Some have described this past year in such a way and have expressed the desire that it just be 'cancelled'. On Amazon you can purchase windcheaters and T-shirts with the printing "2020 - ANNUS HORRIBILIS". However, I recently read a poem by a freelance writer, Leslie Wright, who challenged the notion of the frightfulness of this year and the wish that 2020 was cancelled. She wrote:

"What if 2020 isn't cancelled?

What if 2020 is the year we've been waiting for?

A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw – that it finally forces us to grow.

A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us from our ignorant slumber.

A year we finally accept the need for change.

Declare change.

Work for change.

Become the change.

A year we finally band together, instead of pushing each other further apart.

2020 isn't cancelled, but rather the most important year of them all."

Despite all the hardships, deaths as a result of the Coronavirus, the economic chaos and the collapse of businesses and industries, perhaps this past year has also been for individuals, societies and globally, a year that should afford the opportunity to make changes in our lives and lifestyles. What are the good things we have learnt that we can take into the future, and what are the life-sapping, maybe even destructive behaviours that we need to leave behind? These are some of the thoughts I have as we conclude this year.

As we approach the end of 2020, I would like to express my gratitude and my well-wishes to you all, the parishioners of our three partnered parishes. Particularly, I would like to publicly express my gratitude to our Assistant priests – Lenin Thenamirtham and Tao Pham. As you may well know, Lenin has a few weeks ago been appointed to North Balwyn and has been replaced by Dixon George. I would like to also thank Owen Doyle, our dedicated and locally resident retired priest, who just a few weeks ago, had a fall and fractured 2 vertebrae in his neck and is consequently in a neck brace for another several weeks.

I pray for his swift recovery.

I am extremely grateful for the support and dedicated commitment to pastoral work in our parishes by Jacinta Bright and Sr. Margaret Sapsford, our Pastoral Associates. This year has placed considerable demands on our pastoral activities, especially in relation to organising, developing and maintaining extraordinary processes of COVID-safe practices. A team of volunteers has responded to calls for cleaning and sanitising our churches after each ceremony. I am particularly grateful to Pat Guatta, Lisa Leahy, Francesca Olofsson and Sharon Prosser, our parish secretaries as well as to Denise Chang-Faux, our community liaison officer, who are the immediate face and voice of the parish offices and who especially assist me in my administrative Responsibilities. They have all worked either at home or in the parish offices when they were able to do so, under very difficult circumstances.

This year as we have been restricted to our own homes has presented opportunities to work differently and explore innovative ways of being connected. Our Friday Morning Teas across the parishes have enabled people to be connected and socialise with one another online. Two sessions of presentations over Zoom entitled "The Wonders of the Cosmos" led by a parishioner, John O'Connor, a cosmologist, Jacinta and myself have explored the connections and interrelationship between the truths of our Catholic Faith with the new insights gained from the physical and natural sciences. These are just some of the examples of how we have used modern technology to offer opportunities for faith formation and social interaction. Parishioners have also reached out through phone calls and letter drops to express our parishes' expression of care for each other. I am grateful for the ways they have expressed this outreach.

The year has placed massive demands on our schools to provide online learning. The coordination of this for the education and welfare of our children has required a great deal of wise leadership and coordination with staff and parents. Parents have realised the wonderful work that teachers do as they have more actively participated in the education of their children. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Jim O'Sullivan, David Delaney and Marisa Matthys, our school principals; because it is together that we lead the parishes in pastoral care, education and spiritual formation.

We are also reliant on the many groups and committees with whom we work collaboratively, particularly the Parish Pastoral Councils, Finance Committees, the School Advisory Boards and Parish Education Board. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the many individuals and groups who dedicate so much time and energy to the life of our parishes in liturgy, pastoral care, catechesis, faith formation, fundraising, peer support and ministry and property maintenance and development because they are committed to the enrichment of our communities by what they do. In general I would like to thank everyone's involvement in the life of our parishes because your contribution and participation is what continues to give these communities their great spirit and energy and expresses a welcome to those who come to us with their needs.

Finally, I thank the many parishioners who have showered me with gifts for Christmas; for your thoughtfulness and care of me throughout the year. I pray that each of you may have a joyous, peace-filled celebration of

Christmas with your loved ones. May God guard you and keep you safe these holidays, especially as you travel, and that you may be revitalized for the coming year. I pray that God blesses you abundantly with all you need throughout 2021 – a new year of new opportunities for growth within ourselves, in our relationships with one another, and with God who continues to make his home among us in the messiness of our lives.



Parish Priest

Combined Parishes



Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) Midnight

25 December 2020

First Reading Is 9:1-7

A son is given to us.

The people that walked in darkness
has seen a great light;
on those who live in a land of deep shadow
a light has shone.
You have made their gladness greater,
you have made their joy increase;
they rejoice in your presence
as men rejoice at harvest time,
as men are happy when they are dividing the
spoils.
For the yoke that was weighing on him,
the bar across his shoulders,
the rod of his oppressor,
these you break as on the day of Midian.
For all the footgear of battle,
every cloak rolled in blood,
is burnt
and consumed by fire.
For there is a child born for us,
a son given to us
and dominion is laid on his shoulders;
and this is the name they give him:
Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God,
Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.
Wide is his dominion
in a peace that has no end,
for the throne of David
and for his royal power,
which he establishes and makes secure
in justice and integrity.
From this time onwards and for ever,
the jealous love of the Lord of hosts
will do this.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 95:1-3. 11-13 R. Lk 2:11

***(R.) Today is born our Saviour,
Christ the Lord.***

1. O sing a new song to the Lord,
sing to the Lord all the earth.
O sing to the Lord, bless his name. (R.)
2. Proclaim his help day by day,
tell among the nations his glory
and his wonders among all
the peoples. (R.)
3. Let the heavens rejoice and earth
be glad,
let the sea and all within it thunder praise,
let the land and all it bears rejoice,
all the trees of the wood shout for joy
at the presence of the Lord
for he comes,
he comes to rule the earth. (R.)
4. With justice he will rule the world,
he will judge the peoples with
his truth (R.)

Second Reading Ti 2:11-14

God's grace has been revealed to all people.

God's grace has been revealed, and it has made
salvation possible for the whole human race and
taught us that what we have to do is to give up
everything that does not lead to God, and all our
worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained
and live good and religious lives here in this
present world, while we are waiting in hope for
the blessing which will come with the Appearing
of the glory of our great God and saviour Christ
Jesus. He sacrificed himself for us in order to
set us free from all wickedness and to purify
a people so that it could be his very own and
would have no ambition except to do good.

Gospel Acclamation Lk 2:10-11

Alleluia, alleluia!

***Good News and great joy to all
the world:***

***today is born our Saviour, Christ
the Lord.***

Alleluia!

Gospel Lk 2:1-14

Today a saviour has been born for you.

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of
the whole world to be taken. This census – the
first – took place while Quirinius was governor of
Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be
registered. So Joseph set out from the town of
Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea,
to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he
was of David's House and line, in order to be
registered together with Mary, his betrothed,
who was with child. While they were there the
time came for her to have her child, and she gave
birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him
in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger
because there was no room for them at the inn.
In the countryside close by there were shepherds
who lived in the fields and took it in turns to
watch their flocks during the night. The angel
of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of
the Lord shone round them. They were terrified,
but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen,
I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared
by the whole people. Today in the town of David
a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the
Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a
baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a
manger.' And suddenly with the angel there was
a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God
and singing:

*'Glory to God in the highest heaven
and peace to men who enjoy his favour.'*

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Reflection by Dianne Bergant CSA

The Gospel situates the birth of Jesus within Roman rule of the first century. Through the Incarnation, the ordinary becomes transparent and reveals the extraordinary; the divine is known in the child. Only those of humble heart experience this wonder. They behold it and they come to embrace it. In fact, it is the nature of this child, born in history, to reverse the orders of power.

God is portrayed as a valiant liberator who champions the cause of justice and who brings a liberation that reverses history and the ways of war, power and oppression. This reversal is made more shocking by the fact that the one who is the mighty warrior and conqueror of the nations is a child. This child is the weak and voiceless one, the one who has neither power nor legal rights. God's reversal of the long-standing realities of this world is accomplished through the apparently insignificant, through the gift of this child who is given to us in the middle of the night.

Something new has happened: the age of God's fulfilment has arrived. The age of grace and fresh hope, made available to all people of good will, is an era of redemptive presence. Now all people can walk in the newness of life and grace. Yet, while this new age has begun, it is not yet fully realised. We live believing in its presence and awaiting its fulfilment. Although we are celebrating Christmas, we still await the final coming of the Lord.