

My dear parishioners,

At the Christmas Midnight Mass the first scripture reading comes from the Prophet Isaiah. We hear his hopeful words, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone...you have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing”. Isaiah was in a desperate time and place with his people. They were conquered by aggressive forces, brought into captivity, witnessed the dissolution of their families and livelihood and the destruction of their precious country. They wondered if they would ever return to the normal and familiar. This dire situation happened 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Does their plight in some way mimic ours today almost 3000 years later?

For nearly a year we have lived with fear and uncertainty and have grappled with anxieties. Our interaction with our families, friends and even our churches has been seriously curtailed or limited. Many families lost loved ones to the Covid-19 virus while being unable to comfort them in their last earthly hours. The harmful effects of disengagement hover over us and could change the way we once lived, setting into motion an unfamiliar “new normal”. Still I invite you to meditate on the words of Isaiah the Prophet. God has not abandoned us. God is our reason to have hope. The light that Isaiah spoke about so insightfully and poignantly is the promise of the Christ: Emmanuel, God with us. Hence we have every reason to have hope and never be afraid or feel abandoned, even in the most challenging moments of our lives.

I am confident that our prayers and good works have borne fruit. Many people have reached within and beyond themselves to support and sustain others in generous and courageous ways, putting themselves at risk so that others will know their unselfish love of God and the good neighbor. This is the true spirit and meaning of Christmas. It is the gift of the life and love of Jesus Christ given to us by God to lead us out of the darkness of sin and despair. It is the renewed promise of hope and new life. As parishioners of Sacred Heart of Jesus you have clearly shown how prayerful, generous and thoughtful you are in the challenges we face in our parish, in the community in which we live and in the global needs of God's people who struggle to know their own dignity as children of God. I am humbled by you and grateful to you. Let us continue to allow the grace of God's love in Christ Jesus to open our hearts and minds to a restored life of committed faith and a firm trust in God's provident guidance, the Light dispelling the gloom of today.

On behalf of Fr. Gregory Hoppough, Deacon Pasquale Mussulli, our dedicated employees and staff I wish you and your families and friends a very Merry Christmas and a New Year 2021 of joy, good health and fulfillment. I assure you of my prayers, especially at the Christmas Masses I am privileged to celebrate. God bless you, good friends.

Fr. Richard