Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christmas is the season of great joy, and as the Angels said to the shepherds on that first Christmas night, we no longer have need to be afraid because God’s Word has now been made Flesh in Jesus. We rejoice because our Savior has been born for us. “He is Christ the Lord”!

The joy of Christmas comes from knowing that God, our Loving Father, has taken the initiative in making Himself Present with us in Jesus, the Son of God born of Mary. He sustains His Presence with us by the power of the Holy Spirit through His Church, the sacraments and most especially through Jesus’ Gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist. Christmas comes at the end of the calendar year in the dead of winter, but it always brings with it new life and light, renewed hope for the year to come, and encourages the compassionate healing of past wounds and divisions.

We pray for an end to the pandemic, and the sickness and death that this virulent virus and its variants have caused — the healing of physical, mental, and emotional suffering — here in our beloved Diocese and throughout the world. We pray, too, for our sisters and brothers who have recently suffered such devastating loss of life and property in nearby states, and all who are victims of natural disasters. We pray for all those who are experiencing financial difficulties, and the effects of the widespread political and social turmoil in our country today. We pray that we can be compassionate neighbors to those in need and remain joyfully steadfast in our courageous witness to Jesus and the Good News of His Gospel even in these difficult days. We long for the Lord’s coming to us in our need, now more than ever, and pray that His Presence will help us all to live together in His Peace.

As we celebrate Jesus’ abiding Presence with us at Christmas, and as we look forward with holy hope to what will be in the new Year, we also pray ever more fervently for the guidance, in-spiration, and en-couragement of the Holy Spirit as our “Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit” continues, and in particular as we enter more fully into the synodal process of listening to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and to one another in the upcoming Synod on Synodality Listening Sessions.
Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, the Preacher of the Papal Household and Pope Francis’s spiritual advisor, recently offered a reflection on the Holy Spirit, and on how He helps us to see more clearly God as Father. He reminded us that the Holy Spirit does not do anything new, but rather renews what Jesus has taught and established. As the Cardinal said:

“The Holy Spirit is the only one who opens new paths, without ever denying the former ones. Rather than doing new things, the Spirit renews things! That is, the Spirit does not create new doctrines and new institutions, but renews and breathes new life into those instituted by Jesus. Without the Spirit, we would always lag behind history.”

Our “Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit”, which we are observing now throughout the Diocese of Kalamazoo until Pentecost (June 5, 2022), is primarily an opportunity for all of us to spiritually renew the practice of our own faith, as well as to renew and breathe new life into our parishes, schools and Catholic ministries. It is an invitation to pray, listen, and respond to God’s will for us as individuals, families, and members of Christ’s Body, the Church. Even as we anticipate that sometime soon our Holy Father will be naming my successor to become the Fifth Bishop of our beloved Diocese, it is important that we continue to move forward together as a Community of Faith. A very concrete and real way we can do so is by celebrating joyfully the blessings of Christmas and the promises of the coming year.

As always, we rely on the loving intercession of Mary, the Mother of God whose Feast initiates our New Year. Mary always points to her Son, Jesus, saying, as she did at the wedding feast in Cana, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Mary knows that Jesus is the source of all healing and hope. Among His many gifts to us this Christmas are His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist, the comfort, inspiration and encouragement of His Holy Spirit, and the tender love and compassion of His Blessed Mother. How privileged we are to be traveling together on this synodal journey at this time!

I take this occasion to extend to all of you my prayerful best wishes in this holy season of great joy. May all the blessings and joys of Christmas be yours, and may the Peace of Christ be in your hearts and homes throughout the New Year!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo