

DISTRICT OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Society of Saint Pius X

Saint Mary's House

13 William Street

Rockdale NSW 2216



1 January 2021

Dear Faithful,

First, I wish all of you a very blessed and joyous Christmas season and a happy New Year. After a very difficult and unpredictable year, thankfully this Christmas still included all of the normal consolations for some of you. For many others, sadly, restrictions kept your loved ones at a distance and reduced the solemnity of your customary celebrations. Even more sadly, for some others, even the spiritual consolations of Christmas Mass were not possible. To those who suffered in any of these ways, please accept my sympathy. I offered Midnight Mass for all of you.

In this regard, I would like to mention especially our faithful in Fiji, New Caledonia, Rotuma, and Vanuatu who have been without the consolation of the Mass and the sacraments for many months. Inasmuch as they have had very little contact with their priests, I address this letter in a special way to them. And I also ask the faithful in Australia and New Zealand to generously support these suffering faithful by their prayers and by offering Communion for them.

The joy that is so inseparable from Christmas, even in chaotic times, comes from the unmistakable way it reveals the love of God. This love shines forth in all of His works, but it shines with particular brightness at certain times. God loved the human race from the beginning and bestowed upon our first parents everything that would guarantee happiness for the entire human family and everything required for a painless transition to the divine happiness of heaven. For our first parents, God's love – as infinitely immense as it was delicately thoughtful – was a truth beyond all doubt. Every detail of their life and circumstances testified to the intensity of God's desire to make the children of men happy.

Sin forever changed the circumstances of life, and it is important to understand why. Before original sin, Adam and Eve's happiness never fell short of its potential. Unlike us, they filled each moment up to the brim with the happiness it was capable of containing, but they possessed all of this happiness from God and in dependence upon His plan. Therefore, when they chose to turn away from that plan, they were not so much looking to increase their happiness but rather *to have under their own control the source of their happiness*. They wanted to be self-sufficient in this matter of joy, that is, to "*be as gods*". They were "*deceived*", to use the word of Eve, into thinking that they could have the one thing that no creature can ever have – to be happy without the means and outside the order which God had established precisely to bring happiness within reach.

We have all learned in our catechism that we inherit the consequences of Adam's sinful choice because Adam was the first head of the human race. There is certainly a mystery there, and we may have struggled to understand how it could be that Adam's choice in a particular instant could have produced such a fundamental change in human nature itself. But part of that mystery is explained when we realize that Adam *actually wanted* to change the circumstances of human nature itself. He wanted to give his race a certain independence from God while still enjoying the benefits of God's benevolent plan. Alongside this bad will, Adam's tragic mistake lay in not foreseeing how men would be truly affected by his choice to turn his will away from the infinitely good will of God.

But if sin has the terrible power to change man and to make him deserving of punishment, sin does not have the power to change God. His determination to give joy to men remains unmoved. And this is what is revealed so clearly at Christmas. For man's second chance at happiness, a new head was needed for this fallen race. The Son of God Himself would be that Head. "*God Himself will come and will save you,*" (Isaias 35:4). He comes down from heaven into our world with humility and in poverty. Knowing all too well our prideful sensitivity, He seems eager to come in a way that can give no offense to the illusions of importance and self-sufficiency which sin has produced in us.

He comes in this way for another reason too. He Who comes to restore happiness chooses to be born in circumstances which men naturally associate with unhappiness in order to begin teaching the lesson which will be the central message of His preaching. As Fr Leen reminds us, "Christ's revelation to man was that the obstacle to his happiness *was in himself* not in his *circumstances*. The way to achieve it was first to destroy the secret disorder that reigned in himself, before flinging himself against the manifest disorder that was to be found in things." What derailed man's first joy was the opposition of his will to the good will of God. The essential solution to restoring that joy lay in realigning the human will with the divine and submitting once again to God's plan for sharing His happiness with His adopted children. In the words of Dom Marmion, "By nature God has only one Son; by love, He wills to have an innumerable multitude."

This past year has certainly made obvious "the manifest disorder" in the things around us. Hopefully, it also began to convince us that we cannot rely on circumstances – however good and legitimately desired they may be – to provide that joy which Christians are meant to have and which our Saviour came to give us. Rather, we must *fight* for this joy by fighting the disorder within ourselves. We have little right to mourn over our circumstances until we have first mourned over whatever within us is not in harmony with our Saviour. "*Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*"

Christmas brings us this comfort. Ultimately, the reason why we cannot separate Christmas from joy is because Christian joy *is* Christmas joy. We rejoice in the unchangeable love of God which drove Him to take on our flesh in order to seek out and save us from the unhappiness which our blind thirst for independence had (and still does) condemn us. And we rejoice in the certainty that our Saviour's victory over sin means that we cannot be defeated in our quest for happiness as long as we ourselves do not lay aside our weapons and surrender to the seeds of sadness which we bear within our fallen nature.

But though we are certain of these things, this New Year still opens with many uncertainties. But while we lack answers about the future, that future is under our Saviour's control. He will provide answers if and when we need them. In the meantime, His victory over the devil, sin, and death *continues each time* we correspond to the grace which He offers us at each moment. Our Saviour is absolutely realistic. His grace does not operate on our imaginings, our fears, or our dreams. It works on reality – the specific, concrete elements of our lives and the duties we fulfill each day out of loyalty to Him. To grow in this loyalty is to grow in happiness, and that is the grace I wish for all of you in 2021.

Now a brief word about these letters to you. In the future, we would like to send them to you by post or by email. If you have a preference, please feel free to let us know by emailing us at webmaster@spx.com.au. Or you may call at 02 9567 1355. Also, if you would prefer not to receive them at all but simply to pick them up at your chapel, you may contact us and let us know.

With my blessing in the New Year,



Fr Daniel Themann
District Superior