

**Homily of Bishop Martin Hayes, Bishop of Kilmore, Ireland on Christmas Midnight Mass in the Cathedral of St Patrick & St Felim, Cavan with a focus on World Day of Peace 2025 Message of Pope Francis (in bold).**

Our Gospel speaks of a census. In Old Testament times, we hear that God was not too happy with King David called a census to draft an army. A census was regarded as an affront to God, a declaration that it was humanity that oversaw the world. Tonight, we celebrate that God became one of us, became subject to a census as Jesus came among us as a little vulnerable baby in Bethlehem. God was placed in our hands. Not alone that; Jesus was born in a stable among shepherds who were regarded as untrustworthy and He was laid in a manger for feeding animals. There was no room in any inn, only what amounted to a cave for a shelter. Jesus was born in Bethlehem where Joseph, being of the tribe of David, **had to go** in accord with the regulations for the census.

Therefore, God has not chosen to dwell *at a safe distance* in heaven. God has entered totally into the human world of his time and our time. Was this all somewhat radical? However, it is described in our Gospel as news of great joy and an occasion where light shone and of giving praise and glory to God. The birth of Jesus has had its impact; we are here tonight, thankful, to celebrate and full of hope for the future.

The life of this baby Jesus was to remain largely hidden until he emerged to preach the Good News of God's love for us. He preached and then He put his words into action by giving of Himself completely through his Cross and Resurrection which we commemorate in the Mass. The child that lay in a manger for feeding animals has become the source of spiritual nourishment for us through the mystery of the Eucharist, to sustain us as we are called together to become the Body of Christ in the world.

Jesus came to help us live in harmonious relationships with each other and all of creation, to ensure justice and peace. In a world today, of injustice, turmoil, anxiety and war we can remain hopeful as Jesus offers us that hope and a future of peace. At Christmas we are invited to recall our ideals of seeking justice and peace for everyone.

This Christmas we are preparing for a Jubilee Year which offers the opportunity for the cancellation of all debts, that is, to clear the decks in 2025. Pope Francis is inviting us to make it a Jubilee Year of Hope to bring about peace in our world. The Jubilee Year of Hope has been launched in St Peter's Basilica in Rome this evening with the opening of a Holy Door to indicate a way forward to peace in our world.

**In his Message for the World Day of Peace on New Years Day at the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis,**

- **Highlights how earth is exploited, how our neighbours are oppressed and calls us to make changes to restore justice in our world to ensure that the goods of the earth are for everyone.**
- **Pope Francis is asking us to recognise that God is our Creator, to be grateful to God, to be inspired by a spirit of solidarity and interdependence to forgive all debt, especially that of poor countries.**
- **We must realise that we need each other, according to Pope Francis, and forgive others as God forgives us so as to offer each other hope.**

**That is what we are called to do as followers of Christ, to in the words of St Paul to Titus, our 2<sup>nd</sup> Rd., to give up everything that does not lead to God and all our worldly ambitions – now that’s radical!**

**Specifically, Pope Francis, makes three proposals, that we**

- **Cancel all the debts that are crippling poorer countries,**
- **Protect human life from the moment of conception, eliminate the death penalty and**
- **Use a fixed percentage of money earmarked for arms production to eliminate hunger in poorer countries.**

**Again, I ask is all this somewhat radical? Yet, this our calling, our challenge!**

**We are asked to support these proposals to hold out hope for young people into the future. Pope Francis is calling us to follow the example of Jesus, to engage in the job of disarming hearts so as to offer hope and build peace.**

That is the message of Christmas today and of the New Year ahead that we continue to proclaim. We may ask ourselves, when will we get the message?

We can use all kinds of stories to get across the message of the mystery of Christmas; typical is that of a bird that becomes trapped in our kitchen, it only gets more frightened the more we try to catch it to set it free. We must become a little bird to accompany the trapped bird to freedom. That is why Jesus came among us as one of us, as a little baby who loved us to giving his life for us to so as to free us from the consequences of our own failures with the forgiveness of our sins.

Another image we use is that of ‘**Jesus is the light in the darkness**’, the promise of the light that would shine (1<sup>st</sup> Rd Is.). How do we know the light has dawned? A teacher asked her students when we know that light has dawned,

Is it when we can distinguish between a cow and a deer? No. Is it when we can distinguish between an apple and a peach blossom? No. **It is**, when we can see everyone as a child of God!

*There is the story of parents and their child who were out for a meal at Christmas. Their child, Erik was on his high-chair and he began squealing with glee. They looked around to see a man with a tattered coat, baggy pants, dirty shirt and hair astray smiling at Erik. Soon, Erik and the old man were in a full exchange of ‘Hello, I see you’, ‘Hello, I see you, too’ which had attracted the attention of all in the restaurant and the parents were getting embarrassed. It was an awkward moment for them. They decided to finish their meal and make a run for it, but the old man was seated near the exit door. As they left, Erik, still in loud conversation with the old man, managed despite his mother’s best efforts, to reach out with both arms and he propelled himself into the old man’s arms. There Erik came to rest and the old man cradled him. Then he looked directly at Erik’s mother and in a firm voice said, “Take care of your baby, God Bless you, you have given me my Christmas gift”.*

It is a story which illustrates Christ’s love shown through the innocence of a child named Erik who made no judgement. It is the story too of Erik’s mother who shared her child for a moment and who came to appreciate that God shared baby Jesus with us for all time. He is among us as one of us, rejoice. Happy Christmas.

END.