



DIOCESE OF YOUNGSTOWN

December 10, 2021

Dear Clergy, Religious and Faithful of the Diocese of Youngstown,

First time experiences are always special. These historic moments have a way of lasting forever. Every year at Christmas we as a Church, after much preparation and long-awaited anticipation, celebrate with joy and hope. We rejoice not only over the lasting memory of that first Christmas, but also over the glorious reality of our present experience rooted in the Good News of the Word made flesh that dwells among us.

The sacred crèche of Jesus, Mary and Joseph adorns our homes and churches and brings that first Christmas into our present day. We cannot help but sing that age-old hymn: “O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him. Christ the Lord,” as we welcome once again the Christ child into our midst.

The celebration of Christmas is so rich that there are four different Masses that include the Vigil, Night, Dawn and Day. In each of these times, the prayers and readings are unique. What is more, the sacredness and depth of this Christmas mystery cannot be confined to one day, and so we traditionally celebrate the Christmas Octave (or eight-day week), which in fact signals one long day that transitions into a season. Indeed, first time experiences are rich and forever!

In the first reading from the Midnight Mass, we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah. He says: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwell in the land of gloom, a light has shone” (Isaiah 9:1). Christmas commemorates the coming of Jesus, the light of the world, into our lives.

In a world riddled with the darkness of sin and suffering, we need this light. With Christians throughout the world, we behold this light that illumines our darkness. But it is never enough to just look at this light.

The Gospel for the Mass of the Day recounts the role of John the Baptist. We hear these words: “He was not the light, but came to testify to the light” (John 1:8). Like John the Baptist, we too are called through our Christian baptism to testify to the light. This means that we make every effort in our thoughts, words, and deeds to be missionary disciples of Jesus who always exude light and hope especially in moments of darkness. Imagine how much brighter this world could be, not to mention how even richer our celebration of Christmas could be, if only we would welcome and testify to that light.

As I celebrate my first Christmas with you as Bishop of Youngstown, please know how grateful I am for the light and gift that you all are to this local Church and to me. I wish you many blessings and lots of light. Together as we continue our journey let us resolve to testify to the light and never stop praying: *That All May Be One*. Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown

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