

## Bishop's Reflection – Christmas

The story of forced migration may well have changed over the years, but essentially it's still the same as ever. In the days of Jesus' birth, it begins with the tyrant Caesar Augustus and the need to update the taxation records; today it may involve some lesser-known tyrant from some lesser-known country or the forced migration of workers or those who are expropriated from their land. No matter the injustice, the result is the same, millions of people on the move each year; their plight is far from the romantic notion we have helped construct of Jesus' birth.

And yet, their forced migration is only the beginning. There is also the matter of the welcome they receive. Closed borders, forced detention centres, prejudice and substandard housing, these are only a few of the road blocks migrants face. As was the case with the Holy Family, so many years ago, there is so little room in the Inn today.

As much as things change, they stay the same. The lot of Christ is the lot of so many people, year in and year out. Do not look for God in fancy palaces, among people with fame and fortune and success to spare. Look rather at those who live in crowded and stable-like conditions or those who are generous enough to open their homes and their lives to those in need. Welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit those who are in need. Christmas bears a simple message: "Look, your God comes to you, do you not recognize him at your door?"

These words may seem harsh to some, and comforting to others. For this pandemic has exposed the fear, insecurity and frailty that accompanies each of our lives. Many of us may have felt abandoned by God as comforts and privileges were slowly stripped away and we were forced to adapt to a simpler, more regulated lifestyle. For those willing to enter the spiritual struggle, a struggle that lay bare the reason of our hope, God was seen in kindness to strangers, care to those who were sick and in need, generosity to those who needed assistance, forgiveness towards those who may have done us wrong. In short, for those who looked for God in a quick end to the pandemic, he was incarnate in those who needed our attention and in those who responded from their hearts.

As we celebrate this Christmas, let's not spend our time talking about what the Caesars of the world are doing, or get caught up in mere tinsel and glitter, but in our concern for what God is doing on the streets and in our lanes, in our towns and in our villages, in our homes and in our trailer parks. We might be surprised at what we discover; a God who comes to us in the ordinariness of our lives and equips us to serve him and others in the most basic of ways: to listen, to comfort, to serve and to provide, to sow the seeds of hope that come with faith, to proclaim that God is born as one of us, born to be welcomed or rejected, to be honoured or to be despised.