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THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PARMA

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Pastoral Letter of Bishop Milan Lach for Christmas 2022

Christ is Born!

Dear brothers and sisters, on Christmas we celebrate the central mystery of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ, the second divine person of the Holy Trinity becomes Emmanuel, meaning God with us. In these festive days, where there are many poetic texts throughout the celebrations of our liturgy, we taste and sing this central mystery of our faith that guides us in our Christian journey.

The poetic theology of our Byzantine liturgy leads us to contemplate, sing, and celebrate our faith with an approach of peace and beauty. The two aspects, peace and beauty, so often are not forgotten, but they are certainly left aside by some people in these days of Christmas. Peace, the gift of the Lord to us Christians, is not synonymous with a simple absence of any controversy or struggle, but it is truly synonymous with that "peace that comes from above" as we experience it so many times during the Byzantine liturgy. It is that peace which is not a simple silence or muteness of arms or polemics, but it builds bridges and good relationships, which gives us the following beautiful word: Emmanuel. In the Byzantine liturgy, we ask the Lord several times "...for an angel of peace, faithful guide, guardian of our souls and bodies". The angel of peace is the Lord Himself who guides us and keeps us in our Christian journey.

Maybe you have personally experienced in moments of anguish, controversy, or difficulty, how the liturgical celebration, and also the place of the celebration itself, is like a home in its welcoming beauty, almost like a womb that makes us feel safe, and which renews us and makes us something new. This liturgical celebration has become for us, and has always been, a place of peace and serenity. The community that celebrates, the church where it is celebrated, and the liturgy certainly have a therapeutic dimension in our lives, but above all, these must always primarily have a dimension of spiritual healing, of spiritual renewal, of recreating a spiritual creation. Therefore, in faith we know and confess this based on what we sing in the Kontakion of Christmas: "Today the virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One".

On this Christmas of 2022, I urge you to live this peace and beauty, despite the world of crisis and of wars - and I deliberately use the plural here, because there are too many wars in our world. Additionally, there are instances of social, political, and economic crisis existing throughout the world, that are being used by the terrible war in Ukraine, for example, to create division amongst societies and mostly through non-solidarity.

Let us ask the Lord to make us men and women who are "the builders and not the demolishers of peace". I encourage you to be and to live as men and women of the Church who are builders of peace, as the Lord Himself asks of us in His Gospel, as well as being men and women of



consolation. Furthermore, I urge you to be men and women who inspire, in the strongest sense of the term, that is, instead of giving in to lamentations and tears, which only bring us back to the past, you will know how to give a word of encouragement, a word that builds up the future, which builds hope. Let us be men and women who are builders of peace and beauty. Let us be men and women of forgiveness and reconciliation, seeing in each other not what makes another different from us, whether by language, ethnicity, origin, or perhaps human and intellectual formation, but by always seeing in each other the brother and sister for whom Christ was born, died, and rose again.

Dear brothers and sisters, on this Christmas I urge you to be men and women deeply touched by the mystery of the Word of God incarnate for us, born in the poverty of a cave, in the poverty of a world tested by war. May the joy of our Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, reside in your hearts. Merry Christmas!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Rev. Milan Lach, S.J.
Bishop of the Eparchy of Parma of the Ruthenians