



The Catholic Light

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

Weekly E-Newsletter

December 21, 2023

Contemplate the greatness of God's love in the simplicity of a creche, Bishop Bambera says in Christmas message



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Eight hundred years ago as the Church celebrated the latter days of Advent and prepared to commemorate the birth of Jesus, a cherished tradition in our lives as Christians was born.

Traveling from Rome to Assisi after having just received approval from the Pope for his brotherhood, Saint Francis stopped along the way in the little Italian town of Greccio. Having visited the Holy Land, the caves in Greccio reminded Francis of the countryside of Bethlehem. So, he asked a local man named John to help him celebrate with the faithful of the town the holy night of Christmas by replicating the original scene in Bethlehem.

Saint Francis' biographers described in detail what then took place in Greccio: "On December 25, friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought flowers and torches to light up the holy night. When Francis arrived, he found a manger full of hay, an ox, and a donkey. All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. At Greccio, there were no statues – just a manger, an ox, and a donkey; the nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present."

That Christmas night, eight centuries ago, began the tradition of the Nativity scene that we maintain in our churches and in our homes. For all its familiarity and the tendency that we may have to diminish its significance in the face of so many other competing symbols and traditions associated with Christmas, we would do well to pause at some point in this sacred season to reflect upon the message that lies at the heart of this treasured scene.

Like the faithful people of Greccio, Italy, look beyond the statues or figurines and imagine yourself in Bethlehem in a cave, with animals, straw, dirt, and a promise provided by a newborn baby boy.

In God's plan to save His people, Jesus didn't set Himself apart from the ordinariness of human life.

No, Jesus immersed Himself in the human condition of our world, for all its beauty and peace, its brokenness and pain, its sin and suffering. And He did so for a reason: In coming into our lives as a baby born in a manger – hardly a sign of power, self-sufficiency or pride – God lowered Himself so that we could walk with Him and He could stand beside us, not above or far from us, to lead us on the pathway to His promise of life and peace.

All too often, however, we are quick to leave the cave of Bethlehem and travel other pathways to achieve meaning and purpose in our lives. We set aside the message of salvation proclaimed throughout the ages by the life, love, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus. We're reluctant to heed his

invitation to walk in his footsteps. Then we wonder why our lives are so unsettled and peace in our hearts, our homes and our world, appears to be so elusive. We wonder why God can't provide us with a way out of suffering and pain in Israel, Ukraine, far too many places throughout our world, at our borders, in our neighborhoods, in our families and in our hearts.

Brothers and sisters, the good news and blessing of Christmas is that God has already provided us a way forward with hope if we are wise and humble enough to embrace the message of Bethlehem and the birth of his Son.

May we pray during these cherished days for peace in our troubled world, especially in the Holy Land where our Prince of Peace was born. May we open our hearts to the grace of God and the great mystery of salvation won for us through the simple story begun in a cave in Bethlehem that continues to be the world's true and lasting reason for hope!

With gratitude for the privilege of serving as your Bishop and with prayers for a holy and blessed Christmas for you, your family and all you hold dear, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton

[Read and Share Bishop Bambera's Christmas 2023 Message from the Diocese of Scranton Website](#)

**Looking for a Christmas Mass time?
Full Schedule of Mass times for parishes is
available online**



Come Home for Christmas!

For a full schedule of Mass times for all parishes in the
DIOCESE OF SCRANTON
visit dioceseofscranton.org

All 110 parishes in the Diocese of Scranton are preparing to celebrate Christmas with various Masses on Sunday, Dec. 24, and Monday, Dec. 25, 2023.

If you have not attended Mass in a while, we welcome you home to celebrate the birth of Jesus. A full listing of parish Mass times is available on the main page of the Diocese of Scranton website (dioceseofscranton.org) or by clicking the link below.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will celebrate the 4 p.m. Vigil Mass on Sunday, Dec. 24 at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton. That Mass will be broadcast live on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton.

Bishop Bambera will also celebrate Midnight Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter at Midnight.

[Click Here for a Full Listing of Christmas Mass Times by Parish](#)

Catholic Social Services and three area non-profits provide thousands of toys to families in need



Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton, along with Friends of the Poor, Catherine McAuley Center and the Salvation Army have had a very busy week.

On Monday and Wednesday, the four non-profit agencies distributed toys to more than 1,300 pre-registered families as part of their annual "Gifts for Kids" program that has been in existence for more than a decade.

On Thursday, Dec. 21, hundreds of additional families who were not able to pre-register for the program were invited to get toys for their children at a first come, first served distribution at the Byron Center at The University of Scranton.

Even though the doors of Thursday's distribution did not open until 9 a.m., some parents were waiting outside as early as 4 a.m.

[Click Here to Watch a Video from Catholic Television Regarding the Toy Distribution Event in Scranton](#)

Pope: Gifts and parties are OK, but don't forget about Jesus at Christmas



Exchanging Christmas gifts and organizing holiday parties are all well and good, but Christians should contemplate the scene of Jesus' birth to recover what is truly important during the Christmas season, Pope Francis said.

At his weekly general audience Dec. 20, just five days before Christmas, the pope told people that "the risk of losing what matters in life is great, and paradoxically increases at Christmas."

“The atmosphere of Christmas is changing,” he said. “It’s true, if people want to give presents, that’s good, but with the frenzy of shopping, ‘go, go, go,’ this pulls one’s attention somewhere else, and there is not that simplicity of Christmas.”

[Read the Full Story from Catholic News Service](#)

Doctrinal Dicastery explains how, when gay couples can be blessed



A Catholic priest can bless a gay or other unmarried couple as long as it is not a formal liturgical blessing and does not give the impression that the Catholic Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage, the Vatican doctrinal office said.

The request for a blessing can express and nurture “openness to the transcendence, mercy and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered,” the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith said in a formal declaration published Dec. 18.

The document, “Fiducia Supplicans” (“Supplicating Trust”) was subtitled, “On the pastoral meaning of blessings,” and was approved by Pope Francis during an audience with Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, dicastery prefect, Dec. 18.

In his introductory note, Cardinal Fernández said questions about a priest blessing a LGBTQ+ or other unmarried couple had been sent to the doctrinal office repeatedly over the past few years.

[Read the Full Story from Catholic News Service](#)

Statement of the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, on Declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*



On Monday, December 18, 2023, the Vatican’s Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the Declaration, “Fiducia Supplicans” (“Supplicating Trust”) which was approved by Pope Francis.

In response to the Declaration’s release, the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, issued the following statement:

“With the approval of Pope Francis, the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith issued the Declaration, Fiducia Supplicans, on Monday, December 18, 2023. The Declaration clarifies that there are forms of blessings within the Church and recounted throughout the Sacred Scriptures,

which are ‘poured out on others as a gesture of grace, protection, and goodness’ (18).

“The Diocese of Scranton is guided by the teachings of the Holy Father, and I invite all people of good will to join me in reading, praying, and reflecting upon the new Declaration, which carefully distinguishes between liturgical (sacramental) blessings and pastoral blessings, which may be spontaneous or personal.

“As evangelizers, we desire to bring the love and Good News of Jesus to every person, yet we know many people struggle to encounter God in their lives for one reason or another. Blessings, therefore, offer all people ‘an invitation to draw ever closer to the love of Christ.’ (44)

“The Declaration is very clear that the Church’s teaching on marriage has not changed – clearly upholding the sacrament of marriage as between a man and a woman – and is also specific regarding the possibility and context of blessings for couples in irregular situations and for couples of the same sex.

“As the Declaration states, ‘this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding,’ adding, ‘such a blessing may instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a shrine, a meeting with a priest, a prayer recited in a group, or during a pilgrimage’ (39-40).

“The pastoral sensitivity being shown by Pope Francis in this new Declaration is evident and most understandable as it states, ‘when people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection’ (25). To the contrary, the Declaration is intended ‘as a tribute to the faithful People of God, who worship the Lord with so many gestures of deep trust in his mercy and who, with this confidence, constantly come to seek a blessing from Mother Church.’

“May this Declaration enable all of us who seek to walk by faith to feel the closeness and compassion of God.”

[Read Bishop Bambera's Statement on the Diocese of Scranton Website](#)

Vatican Declaration on blessings opens door to those seeking God, official says



The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration on informally blessing same-sex couples or other non-married couples is a reminder that the Catholic Church and its pastors never close the door on people seeking God's help, said a commentary published in Vatican media.

"The heart of a shepherd cannot remain indifferent to the people who approach him, humbly asking to be blessed, regardless of their condition, their history or the path of their life," said the commentary by Andrea Tornielli, editorial director of the Dicastery for Communication.

"The shepherd's heart does not extinguish the flickering light of one who senses their own incompleteness, knowing they need mercy and help from on High," Tornielli wrote in a piece published Dec. 18 in multiple languages on the Vatican News website and in the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

[Read the Full Story from Catholic News Service](#)

Have you answered "Our Call to Serve?"



Merry Christmas!

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OF THE LORD

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Gifts to the 2023 Diocesan Annual Appeal are needed to help support life-changing ministries across the Diocese of Scranton, including Hispanic ministry programs.

From helping to support seminarians and retired priests, to supporting Catholic education and Communication efforts, to helping Catholic Social Services serve thousands of our neighbors - the work supported by the Annual Appeal is more than any one parish can do on its own!

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