

Bishop Toal's Christmas Message

December 21, 2017

One question I have been asked as we approach Christmas this year is whether Catholics are obliged to go to Mass on both the 4th Sunday of Advent (24th December) and on Christmas Day (25th December). The answer of course is yes, recognising of course that the Sunday obligation may be fulfilled at the Saturday Vigil Mass. Many may choose also to attend a Vigil Mass of Christmas or the traditional Mass During the Night on Christmas Eve having already been at Sunday Mass earlier in the day. Whatever you choose – not forgetting either the Masses on Christmas Day itself – it does seem to me that there is some added spiritual expectation placed upon us with Christmas falling on a Monday. I would also venture to suggest that this is good as it does give opportunity to intensify the spiritual celebration of our great feast through our presence at and participation in the Holy Mass.

Throughout Advent our spiritual expectation at the Lord's coming grows as we prepare to meet Jesus with joyful and loving hearts, and when Christmas arrives our hope is fulfilled as we again greet our Saviour with the same wonder and awe as we see in the images of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds in our cribs. In our celebration of Holy Mass we experience the living, loving presence of the Lord within and among us, and this heightens our awareness of the mystery we celebrate at Christmas – the same Lord's birth and the salvation he came to offer us all. It is the mystery of God's love for humankind and we rejoice in the consolation and hope we receive from him as we are united with him in the Eucharist. This experience of welcoming the Lord and rejoicing in his presence in the Eucharist extends beyond Christmas Day into the other lovely Feast Days of Christmastide – The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph; Mary, the Holy Mother of God; The Epiphany of the Lord; The Baptism of the Lord. Through all of them we ponder anew the wonder of the Incarnation and give thanks to God for all that we have received. I wish you all a joyful and peaceful Christmas and pray that you and all your family and friends will be richly blessed both in celebrating at home and at Holy Mass.

+ Joseph Toal