

CATHOLIC LIFE

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*For Us
a Child is Born*





My dear Catholic People

The brutal assassination of Pierre Gemayel in Lebanon recently is a stark reminder of the cloud of evil that hangs like a pall over today's world. That beautiful but strife-torn country continues its grievous suffering as its Christian citizens continue to flee, reducing their once 60% component in the population to about half that number and falling. Many of them now swell our Maronite and Melkite Catholic communities in Australia and their faith tried in so much suffering and loss enriches the spiritual fabric of the Catholic Church in our country.

In just a short time their voices will join with millions as we sing again the song of the angels: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good-will."

*angelic voices remind us that
Peace is the gift of heaven*

This hymn captures the essence of our hope which no evil can overcome. A war-weary world heard it then; we hear it again at Christmas and we repeat it so often at Mass: angelic voices remind us that Peace is the gift of heaven and the gift has been given. His name is Jesus Christ.

The world was created in peace, a peace destroyed even in Eden by human weakness and malice. But it was the loving wisdom of our God, when all was sin and shame, to restore again that peace and to restore it in human flesh like ours. We call Him, rightly, the God-Man, our Redeemer, our Saviour, the Prince of Peace.

The Church in her every part and member has no other duty before proclaiming Jesus, whose very name means, "God saves." Each Advent we hear with relief John the Baptist's message that the way things were has come to an end and God's restored kingdom of life is on its way. In time Mary the Mother of the Incarnate One would sing to the Father as she bore the Son: He has put down the mighty from their thrones, He has raised up the lowly and He has sent the rich away empty.

Our awareness of what this means makes us a different people, a people who see life from a different perspective from non-believers. Perhaps this has come home to you when you have wished so much that a neighbour or a friend could see what you see, believe what you believe and find in the vision a hope and a courage to endure some suffering that seems to have no meaning or purpose.

*the only war which must
continue in this world is that
warfare of divine grace against
the aberrant spirit of man*

The song of the angels on our own lips again this year will remind us that the only war which must continue in this world is that warfare of divine grace against the aberrant spirit of man; that destructive spirit which exalts the



powerful, admires only the winners and despises the losers. It is that aberrant spirit which has no patience with other people's weaknesses, failures or inadequacies, but sees not its own.

*the real warfare which must
continue, with unremitting
vigour, in each heart, until the
end of time*

This is the real warfare which must continue, with unremitting vigour, in each heart, until the end of time. Our Lady's humility, her entire lack of egocentricity, is the pattern not just for the Christian to model but for the whole world to emulate.

My prayer this Christmas, in solidarity with the people of Lebanon, is that in all the complexities of social and political life in our own and every country, within the Church – herself often troubled by enmities and factions – and within each family, we may inch just a little closer to making the angel's song a reality. Yours devotedly in Christ,

✠ Geoffrey Jarrett,
Bishop of Lismore

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NEWSPIC

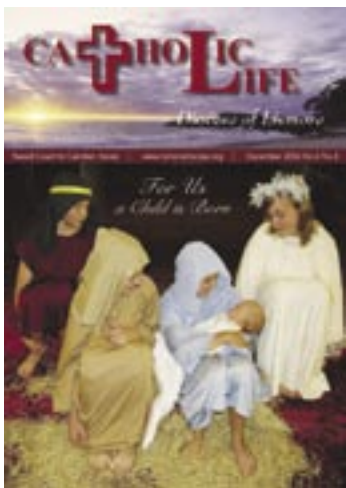
USA WILDFIRES

A statue of the Virgin Mary stands among the ashes of a home destroyed by the Shekell Fire near Moorepark, California Monday 04 December 2006. The fire burned several structures and scorched 10,000 acres.

EPA/PAUL BUCK

Cover caption:

Pupils from Our Lady Help of Christians Parish School South Lismore in their 2006 Christmas Tableau. (From left) Matthew Black, Tomas Williams, Monique McLean, Baby Charlotte Goodwin, and Kellie Casey.



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The Spiritual Map

Many would say that 2006 has gone quickly. Our society has become frenetic, full of expectations, activity, disturbance and confusion.

As the year hurtles to its close, many feel left behind to contemplate if they are in the right place at the right time.

Is there somewhere, some space to rest and evaluate what has been packed into the memory bank of our experience?

We are welcomed to rest, to ponder, to be nourished and refreshed.

The Christmas Liturgy bids us welcome. We are welcomed to rest, to ponder, to be nourished and refreshed. The celebration of Christmas invites us to register our interest, to follow the spiritual map to Bethlehem and to see our life again through a spiritual lens that opens on the Saviour who tells us not to fear because he has overcome the world.

Such a message is reassuring in a world that is out of balance. The global community is struggling for its future, trying to adjust its wants and needs to fit within the limits of what planet earth has to offer. There is a cry for a new context in which to live, where there is no more war or terrorism or fear from nuclear threats. There is a plea for ecological balance, equal rights and justice. Where is the escape from the culture of fear? From where does hope beckon?

The message of Christmas is a message of possibility. Christ came to expand the possibility of human life. His Good News mapped out the possibility that human life could be redeemed, often from its own limitations and the destructive forces of evil. He overcame the



death of it all to offer resurrection, the greatest possibility of all.

Many would say that our society has lost the spiritual map. In achieving so much material benefit we have lost a deep spiritual and moral sense that previous generations had. We have gained knowledge of what is but we continually doubt what ought to be. For many today, their faith in the spiritual values of living is like a therapeutic encounter.... at the time it feels good but the feeling soon passes. We are so often tranquilised by the trivial.

We are so often tranquilised by the trivial.

Each Christmas celebration tells us that what we have lost

What we have damaged in our life, we can restore. What we have destroyed we can begin to rebuild.

is possible to recover. What we have damaged in our life, we can restore. What we have destroyed we can begin to rebuild. What we have wasted we can gather up and try to reuse again.

Faith in the saving hope of possibility requires strength. It is for this strength that we pray this Christmas.

"The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light" (Christmas Liturgy)

*Father Peter M. Karam
Editor*