



Diocese of Whitehorse
BISHOP'S OFFICE

Pastoral Letter for the Season of Advent 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every year the Church starts a new liturgical year with the time of Advent which is truly a season of hope. As we ponder that God has created us in His image and came to live among us in the form of His only son, we are filled with hope that He will come back victorious as He has promised. As St. Paul says: “To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see”. (*Hebrews, 11:1*)

In the next four weeks, we are invited to de-clutter a bit our lives and to make more space for God as we await His coming. Advent cannot be merely reduced to a season of cooking and shopping for Christmas celebrations; Advent, rather, invites us to actively wait for the Lord. We receive the good news: Jesus is the true love, and He is near! Yet when we hear about conflicts, riots and wars around the world, we might doubt the Lord's presence. In our personal or familial struggles, we can easily end up in darkness or in anguish; at times we may feel powerless or confused. Is there truly hope? What do we hope for? Though we may not be fully aware, in our most inner being we are continuously hoping for God who is the answer to all our desires. Only when we are fully immersed in His infinite love can we be truly filled with peace and hope. Once we trust in the Lord and build our house on solid rock, all worldly affairs and preoccupations lose their importance; all our worries and anxieties disappear and nothing can shake us. Thus, the prophet Isaiah encourages us to wait for God through difficult times, being certain that “No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him.” (*Isaiah, 64:4*) And the Lord is truly coming! As Pope Francis put it: “Just as before our birth, our loved ones expectantly awaited our coming into the world, so now Love in person awaits us.” (*Pope Francis, Homily on the First Sunday of Advent, 2020*)

The Gospel of today reminds us to “be watchful and alert” (*Mark 13:33-37*). When darkness abounds, it may be easy to believe that we are alone, or we might run searching for comfort, light and security in the wrong places. The Word invites us to be watchful, alert and not to be distracted by day-to-day life issues. Saint Augustine said: “I fear that Jesus will pass by me unnoticed”. Pope Francis adds: “It is important to remain watchful, because one great mistake in life is to get absorbed in a thousand things and not to notice God.” (*Twitter, @Pontifex, Aug. 28 2021*). How can we avoid the mistake that the Holy Father speaks of? We nourish ourselves with the Word and the sacraments, and we pray with our Church community. It is through the daily life of the Church with our brothers and sisters in Christ that we can concretely see, taste, and live the Love of God. This experience, together with the sacramental graces, gives us the strength to remain vigilant. Protected from temptations and distractions, we empower and nourish our calling to love. Not afraid of tomorrow, we stay firm in belief that our salvation is found in our relationship with Christ.

This First Sunday of Advent's readings represent the hope of the Advent season – we are invited to stay watchful and to seek God so we can be ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Father loved us so much that He sent His Son, who did not scorn our humanity but rather elevated and dignified it. Our very nature has been redeemed in His love. This is the theme for this liturgical year in our diocese of Whitehorse: *Called to Love!*

This year, let us renew our faith knowing that we are loved by God truly as we are. Let us unite in our mission to love God with all our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us remember that God is ever present in our lives, not only during the Advent season as we anticipate the birth of Christ, but also in His second coming and in our lives everyday throughout the year. God is always present! Let this truth shine through us so that we may be beams of light for this world, for our families, and in our workplaces, schools, Catholic community, and neighborhoods!

May God bless each and everyone of you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by the name 'Héctor Vila' in a cursive script.

+ Héctor Vila