



THE CHURCH IN MALTA

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
Archdiocese of Malta

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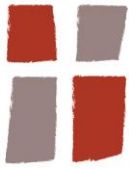
CHRISTMAS MESSAGE BY BISHOP CHARLES J. SCICLUNA

I invite you to the live crib which the residents of Lija organize annually. From this place, I would like to reflect upon the grotto at Bethlehem, the stable which was the birthplace of the Son of God made man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The stable brings to mind the fact that the family of Nazareth, upon its arrival in Bethlehem, did not find a room at an inn. The Gospel tells us: “he came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him” (Jn 1:11). Our Lord is born in a cave. A baby who cries but does not impose himself. He does not force us to give up our liberty, nor does he impose upon it. The love of the Infant Jesus is an unconditional proposal and it does not even put pressure upon my response to it. I would like to put forward the following question: How are we going to respond to the Lord this Christmas? Please God, every Christian will have the opportunity to receive the sacraments of Confession and Holy Eucharist, as a sign that he has welcomed the Lord into his heart.

My second reflection upon entering the grotto of Bethlehem is the following: The angel invited the shepherds, who were considered to be the most emarginated of society, to meet the Saviour, a baby crying in a manger. The grotto is a cave which is open to all. In much the same way, our Lord welcomes everyone and he wishes that we too will be inclusive. He invites us to open up our hearts to one and all, just as he did through his birth. This is my question: During the past year, have we opened our hearts to our brethren, possibly even those who we don't agree with or those we view as being completely different to us? Indeed, we need to become an inclusive society: much in the same way as Our Lord embraced our humanity and became man, so we too must have an all-encompassing love that welcomes everyone.

The third reflection which I would like to share with you is an event which took place one hundred years ago, in 1914, in France, during one of the fiercest and most horrendous wars in history. At one point, on Christmas night, the soldiers who were enemies of one another – the Germans against the French and the British – heard each other singing Christmas carols. This reminded them of the words of the angels to the shepherds “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those upon whom his favour rests” (Lk 2:14). The soldiers ceased fire, spoke to one another and also played a football match. Their gesture



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was a sign of solidarity and peace and most probably, it was for Europe the small seed out of which grew that which we enjoy as citizens of Europe.

This same gesture which took place one hundred years ago, also prompts us to reflect upon the situation of the world as it stands today, a world in which many of our Christian brethren are oppressed, or are victims of persecution and of war. On this Holy Night of Christmas 2014, the churches in Mosul, Iraq, have been transformed into prisons where there is torture, and man's dignity is violated. This makes us sad, yet we must not lose heart. In our own small way, let us ask ourselves: what are we doing to make one another welcome, so that we may live in a society and a world which encourages tolerance, solidarity, authentic mercy and peace? Let us pray that among us, there may be more authentic joy.

I cordially wish you all a happy Christmas, filled with many blessings.

✠ **Charles Jude Scicluna**

Titular Bishop of San Leone

Apostolic Administrator of Malta