



OFFICE OF BISHOP MYRON J. COTTA D.D.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we continue our celebration of the Christmas season, I would like to wish all of you: clergy, religious and laity, a Happy New Year filled with God's blessings.

On January 1, we honored Mary as Mother of God and entrusted the New Year to her maternal protection. As we continue to face the reality of the pandemic, with all of its "ups and downs," let us do so, with a steadfast spirit.

All of us know, without a doubt, that the ups and downs will surely come, but we must not allow fear to get a foothold in our lives. We now have the lived experience of 2020 behind us and it gave us the insight to seriously, and prayerfully, prioritize our everyday lives with God at the center of it all. With fortitude, patience and inspiration we have avoided, by God's grace, what could have been, an experience of spiritual paralysis.

As we begin this year, the call to holiness must be our priority throughout 2021. With a renewed prayer life, this call to holiness can be ignited as we acknowledge sin in our lives, repent and work toward ongoing conversion. To grow in holiness is key to the spiritual life. A prayerful and holy life will help us to face and cope with the present health crisis.

For many of us, the past several months have prompted us to reflect on how the pandemic has impacted parish life. I would like to share with you the following words taken from the booklet entitled: *Finding Christ in the Crisis*: "The cross of this time of pandemic is difficult, but our Christian response is not fear-mongering, nor is it a dismissive attitude. Rather, it is the position of hope that looks confidently for Christ in the midst of any suffering and responds in love. The Christian journey is the way of charity, service and sacrifice." Focusing on these three key areas will be all important in the New Year.

Another point presented in *Finding Christ in the Crisis* is a warning referred to as: spiritual narcissism. "It can be tempting to focus solely on our own spiritual lives and neglect the needs of others, whether it be their physical health or their spiritual well-being. This temptation is spiritual narcissism."

This type of narcissism has the capacity to deaden or extinguish all charity, heartfelt service and any true sense of sacrifice in the Christian life and that of the parish community. The Catholic way of life is not only about a - me and Jesus spirituality, but one that acknowledges the love, and recognizes the presence of Jesus, in our neighbor! "Spiritual narcissism can manifest itself in those who think that holiness comes only from frequent reception of the sacraments, and who, as a result, demand the sacraments as a right (not a gift), no matter the cost."



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(Finding Christ in the Crisis) This attitude closes in on itself and does not contribute to the greater good. It is not what we need at this time. What is essential is an attitude of selflessness, the attitude of Jesus.

To help us along the way, and as a means to avoid this narrow and negative attitude in the New Year, Pope Francis has dedicated this year to St. Joseph. St. Joseph's way of life is a great model for us. He teaches us how to be selfless and to be concerned with the care of the other as he did in loving and caring for Jesus and Mary.

May St. Joseph, the patron saint of the Universal Church and protector of the Holy Family, grant special graces to all, especially, the families of our Diocese of Stockton. May God strengthen and renew us in mind and spirit so to empower us to grow in holiness and to fulfill our role as missionary disciples of the New Evangelization. Let this be our resolution throughout this Year of the Lord, 2021.

A blessed and Happy New Year to all!

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us. St. Joseph, Husband of Mary and Guardian of the Redeemer, pray for us.

In the Peace of Christ,

Bishop Cotta