

Celebrating the 2000th Anniversary of Christianity

IN A FEW DAY'S TIME, the Christian world will begin celebrating the 2000th Anniversary of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. We consider the Year 2000 therefore as primarily a Christian Festival, not simply the end of one millennium or, as some believe, the beginning of another.

The 2000th Anniversary of the Birth of Christ

IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA approximately 475,000 of our population of nearly 1.9 million people describe their religious affiliation as Catholic. This message from the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia is primarily directed to the Catholic population of this State to explain the ways in which the Church will be celebrating this momentous anniversary in human history.

At the same time, we join with Christians of all denominations in celebrating this year of grace. We also invite all people of good will to consider the themes of this coming year which we call a Year of Jubilee.

From the earliest murmurings of the human heart, the passage of time has had special meaning to the human person. There is something deep within our nature that causes all of us to want to pause at particular moments in time. The idea that we rest each night and on each seventh day; the idea that we celebrate our birthdays each year and important anniversaries are testimony to this deepest human yearning and need.

A time to celebrate

TO ALL WHO ARE ATTUNED to the continuing relationship between creation, the human race, and that intangible mystery who created us all – whom we call God, The Creator – it is not purely emotionalism that leads us to want to celebrate these important moments in time.

To the Christian person there is an on-going, dynamic and very personal relationship between each one of us and God.

The defining belief of the Christian mind is that, at a singular moment in history, God personally entered into human history by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to live and experience life as we live and experience life. Jesus is described for this reason as "the Word made flesh". He is the incarnation of God, the Father.

It is through our entering into communion with Jesus – through coming to know Him personally and His life, how He thought and how He faced the dilemmas, uncertainties, challenges and joys of life – that we can come to know the mind and will of God for us, both individually and collectively.

We come to know the mind of God through Sacred Scripture, through the teaching of the Church, through the writings of those whom the Church collectively identifies as spiritually gifted or saints, through our own personal prayer, through our collective prayer and liturgies, and through the Sacraments God instituted for us as tangible symbols and channels of His continuing relationship with and love for us.

From the foregoing it is evident that Jesus has a very special, in fact, a unique place in human history. For that reason alone we are entitled to celebrate with special distinction and extraordinary joy the 2000th Anniversary of His Birth.

There are though two other reasons we also invite you to consider through this open letter...

Jesus is not simply "an important figure in human history". He is "the Word made flesh", "the Son of God", "the Son of Man" and "the second person of the Blessed Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit". The invitation to celebrate the 2000th Anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ is not simply an invitation to remember or celebrate a series of historical events that occurred 2000 years ago.

We celebrate what we call the "incarnation" – that is, our belief that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. The union of the human and the divine in Christ

means that the world can no longer be the same. The "incarnation" has radically changed everything.

We are invited to participate in the paschal banquet – that deep union with God through Jesus that calls us to review and renew our awesome relationship with God.

Ultimately the Catholic person views all of their lifespan as a journey towards full reunion with God after death. The condition of our humanness is that, through no individual fault of our own, humankind became separated from God – this is what the story of Adam and Eve and the Doctrine of Original Sin are seeking to convey to us. The quest of the human person through life is to discover the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual pathways of repentance, conversion and forgiveness by which our soul is launched at the end of our lives into an ongoing, eternal communion with the Creator from and by whom we were first made.



So, the second point we invite you to consider is that the coming celebration is not merely a commemoration of an historical moment or even a series of historical moments. The period of celebration we are about to enter is something very dynamic and part of the present and our own place in history. **It is a time of celebration, joy, renewal and reflection about our own dynamic and present relationship with God! It is a time in which we reflect on and celebrate our own part in the continued unfolding of God's plan for creation.**

How might we best celebrate this time?

TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION we travel back in time, back past the historical time of Jesus, to our roots in Judaic culture – to the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament.

It is in Chapter 25 of the Book of Leviticus that the significance of each 50th Year in time was first recorded. Sometime over the next while we invite you to read the whole of Chapter 25 of this book in conjunction with the following summary of what God is seeking to communicate to us spiritually through the stories related therein.

In the whole of Chapter 25, God speaks of our relationship with Him, His relationship with us, our relationships with one another and our relationship with the land and space we inhabit and the possessions we have acquired over time.

In verses 3-8, God sets out the requirements for how His people are to observe the sabbatical (seventh) year, and the requirements for how we should celebrate the year following "seven weeks of years" – the fiftieth or Jubilee Year. In the Great Jubilee Year we symbolically return our possessions to God and acknowledge Him as the rightful owner. We are only the custodians.

In verses 35-55, God sets out in detail the importance of the holiness of His people and how we are to treat one another.

The themes of Jubilee

FROM THIS and other texts in Sacred Scripture a number of themes emerge as to how we should celebrate the Year of Jubilee.

- ☉ It is a whole year of **Sabbath** or rest from our normal sense of striving and human ambition;
- ☉ It is a period of **reflection** on our past and **preparation** for the next era in history – in our case, the third millennium of Christianity;
- ☉ It is a time when we are invited to journey back to our roots and forward to meet the Lord through **Pilgrimage**;
- ☉ It is a time of **Reconciliation** – a time when we forgive the debts owed to us and make restitution and apology for the ways in which we have trespassed on the rights, dignity and welfare of others. Through our acts of reconciliation we reconcile ourselves to God's plan for all of Creation and to God Himself.
- ☉ It is a time where through our **Pilgrimages**, our living of a sense of **Sabbath**, and our commitment to **Social Justice** actions, we offer a public witness to the greatness and love of God and our own innate dignity and equality before one another and before God.
- ☉ In the Christian mind, the Year of Jubilee is a time of great **celebration, joy** and, above all, of **faith, hope** and love.

A whole year of celebration

IN THE FOUR DIOCESES of the Catholic Church in Western Australia, as throughout the international Church, we take up these themes in a whole year of celebration. The celebrations commence this coming Christmas Eve – the 1999th Anniversary of the Birth of Christ – and continue throughout the Year 2000.

The Year 2000 itself then becomes a Year of Great Jubilee and preparation for the 2000th Anniversary of the Birth of Jesus on Christmas Day next year and the beginning of the Third Millennium of Christianity shortly thereafter.

The celebrations conclude on the Feast of the Epiphany with the closing of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica in Rome on 6th January 2001.

During the Year of Great Jubilee on behalf of the whole Church, we extend a deep and sincere invitation to all people of good will, and a special invitation to all those who, for whatever reason, have drifted away from the Church or a relationship with God, to join with us in a spirit of reconciliation, celebration and joy of our oneness as a human family and, whatever our differences in culture and belief, our essential dignity and equality one to the other before God, the Creator of all life and each life.



The Most Rev Barry J Hickey DD OAM
Archbishop of Perth



The Most Rev Robert Healy DD
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth



The Most Rev Peter Quinn DCL
Bishop of Bunbury



The Most Rev Justin Bianchini DD
Bishop of Geraldton



The Most Rev Christopher Saunders DD
Bishop of Broome

A whole year of celebration commencing on Christmas Eve 1999 concluding on 6th January 2001

For further information about the local, diocesan, national, international, ecumenical and inter-religious celebrations you are most welcome to contact your local Catholic church, school, church agency (see the listings under "Catholic" in the White Pages) or the Diocesan Jubilee coordinators at the phone numbers listed below:

Archdiocese of Perth, Liz Owers 9325 5794; Diocese of Broome, Sr Breda O'Reilly 9192 1060; Diocese of Bunbury, Kay Seeber 9581 2061; Diocese of Geraldton, Peter Dew 9921 4365

or visit our website: http://www.perth.catholic.org.au/jubilee_2000/jubilee_2000.html