



Love survives only when it is shared with others

By DENNIS HORTON

No 14. December 2021

The word gospel comes from the Greek, meaning ‘good tidings’. For a world wearied by COVID-19 and its successive variants, the prospect of another Christmas and its promise of fresh hope and new life comes as good news indeed. Advent is here once more, inviting us to prepare in our hearts a place where the Saviour will be welcome to stay.

Aroha mai, aroha atu means compassion and love can abide within us only if we accept the blessing which the coming of Jesus promises. We cannot give what we have not received and taken to heart. So it has been from the opening pages of our Christian story. John starts his gospel by reminding us that Jesus was

sent by God as the true light to enlighten the whole world. ‘He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him.’ He was born an outsider, forced even as an infant to leave home and escape as a refugee.

His message is that true freedom is never just *from* but always *for*. Especially for those like the widow and the orphan who have no one else to take their side – sight for the blind, rest for the heavily burdened, life and light for those who live in darkness and the shadow of death. In Aotearoa New Zealand today, we recognize that the vaccine is not just to keep ourselves free of the virus, but to ensure that others may escape its harm as well. We mask up, to ensure that what we breathe out is no more toxic than what we breathe in. This Advent, these actions are more than ever acts of kindness for others.

Solidarity is one of Mercy’s core values; our hope and promise is that no one is overlooked or left behind. The whānau is where everyone knows they belong. He waka eke noa – we are in the waka together, no one has to fend for themselves. On the global scale, the issues relating to climate change and care for the environment are ones which we must all take to heart. Our common home will survive and prosper only if everyone is willing to do their bit to cherish the environment – especially those whose choices impact on others who can no longer protect themselves, their livelihoods and the places they know as home.

‘There is no time to waste,’ Pope Francis told participants at the COP26 meeting in Glasgow last month. ‘We need both hope and courage. Humanity possesses the wherewithal to effect this change, which calls for a genuine conversion and a decisive will to set out on this path.’ He insisted that care for the environment is a moral imperative to preserve God’s creation for future generations. ‘We have inherited a garden,’ he said. ‘We must not leave a desert to our children.’

This month, the pope has made his second trip to the Greek island of Lesbos, to comfort migrants in a refugee camp and to blast what he described as Europe’s indifference ‘that condemns to death those on the fringe.’ His five-day visit to Cyprus and Greece was dominated by the migrant issue and his call to wealthier nations to stop building walls, stoking fears and shutting out ‘those in need who knock at our door.’

In a month when we celebrate Mercy’s Foundation Day on December 12, Advent brings another chance to see God working in our world in ways that defy human logic and surprise us in unexpected ways. No one knew this better than Catherine McAuley who trusted so deeply in divine providence. ‘How silently the great God works!’ she wrote. ‘Darkness is spread over the earth and light comes again at dawn. Yet there is never a sound of curtains being drawn or shutters being closed.’ Whether or not we can travel to where we might choose, may this Christmas find us ready once more to greet the light which the darkness can never overpower.



AROHA mai, aroha atu: Love received and shared is the theme of this design by Cheryl Connolly rsm. The butterflies point to how a fragile nature can be transformed into something new and beautiful. The koru is inspired by the unfolding tip of the harakeke or flax plant; the golden locket, inscribed with aroha, speaks of a love that never ends. The words remind us of Jesus’ message that love can survive and grow only when it is shared. Graphic used with permission.