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Bishop of Aberdeen
Rt Rev Hugh Gilbert O.S.B.

Pastoral Letter for 1st Sunday of Advent, 2020

To be read and / or otherwise communicated to the Faithful of the Diocese

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you! As Advent begins I want to greet you, to send you my blessing as we all begin a new liturgical year and to wish you, in anticipation, a joyful Christmas. I also want to thank you for all the encouragement and support you have given the clergy and myself throughout this difficult time, especially by your fidelity to our Catholic faith, by your prayer and friendship.

In biblical terms, the whole world is living through a time of “trial”, and us believers additionally so. It is hard not to be able to meet together normally. Hard not to sing and pray together. Hard not to benefit in the normal way from the great resource we have in the proclamation of God’s word and in the Sacraments, especially Holy Communion. In St Paul’s phrase, we “are enriched in so many ways” (1 Cor 1:5) by these things. “Online” is good – thank God it is there. But our faith is social and incarnational, we are members of a Body, and nothing can replace our common, liturgical worship.

Now, thank God, we have hope of a vaccine. And with it should come a gradual return to some kind of normality. We also know, though, that the consequences of the pandemic will be far-reaching and long-lasting, often just bewildering. The times ahead will not be easy. When we pray, “lead us not into temptation” (or “testing” or “trial”), we are praying among other things not to yield or give in to life’s difficulties. We are praying to persevere, praying not to lose hope. We know that God tempts no-one (Jas 1:13) and does not let us be tried beyond what we can bear (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). In its commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, the Catechism says, “the Holy Spirit makes us *discern* between *trials*, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man, and *temptation* which leads us to sin and death” (2847). This is a daily discernment. This is what our Lord means in today’s Gospel when he says three times “stay awake”. This time of trial can then become a precious opportunity for the “inner growth” the Catechism mentions. Many people have felt it. It can prove a time for a greater and more innovative care for each other. We may begin to appreciate more how many of our fellow-believers in the world are permanently deprived of full religious freedom and the public expression of their faith. St Paul’s words about how “these three *remain*: faith, hope and love” (1 Cor 13:13) can also stand out in fresh relief. Faith, hope and love are the heart of our Christianity. Nothing need take them from us and

they can fill every day. We can always pray. And surely, with Pope Francis, we will want to be part of a new aspiration towards human fraternity (*Fratelli tutti*). We can sow good seeds for the future.

Brothers and Sisters, a new liturgical year begins today. In whatever ways we can keep it, it is a great friend and companion on our journey to God, a great resource, a compass for our prayer. By means of it, Christ discloses himself to us. As best we can, let's follow the road of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, our Sundays and feasts. And our Father will keep us "steady and without blame...until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ...God is faithful" (1 Cor 1:8-9).

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ *Hugh* OSB

(Bishop)

28 November 2020

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