

The Bishop's Christmas Message, 2021

Hau‘oli Kalikimaka!

My dearest siblings in Christ Jesus,

We gather again for Christmas 2021 with thoughts of the continuing Pandemic at the end another interesting year.

Last Christmas, we looked to the promised vaccine to help us deal with the COVID-19 virus. This Christmas, we now must deal with the Omicron variation of the same virus. We are still practicing social distancing and wearing our mask. The vast majority of Episcopalians in Hawai‘i – including all the clergy -- who are eligible have been vaccinated. We are getting our boosters. Mahalo! You are a living witness to the Great Commandment. I am proud of the way you – God’s people – have responded in this difficult time.

It is still not the Christmas that we thought would be with us just a few short month ago, but it is still a joy-filled Christmas.

I was able to be at the Christmas Chapels at ‘Iolani School and St. Andrew’s Schools. The joy of the children abounded. It finally felt like Christmas to me.

At last week meeting of Diocesan Council and Standing Committee, I asked our elected Diocesan leaders to share their favorite Christmas hymns. We reflected on the meaning of the words for our faith and the meaning for our lives. The full meaning of Christmas was evident in the stories we shared.

My favorite Christmas hymn is from a poem by Christina Rossetti. Written in 1885, she named it “Christmastide.” The hymn version is number 84 in *The Hymnal 1982*.

The words bring a smile to my face whenever I read them or we sing the hymn (though we don’t sing it in church nearly enough for me during the short Christmas season):

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,*

*Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

I am not much of a mystic. I read the Bible daily and say my prayers. Sometimes, I'll say prayers with a rosary. During the Pandemic, I have taken the practice of saying the Jesus Prayer – “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me” -- with prayer rope made for me by a Franciscan Brother. I say the prayer on my walks and even during Zoom meetings – too many Zoom meetings. I say it as prayer for you.

I don't doubt God, but I'm not always sure what the divine might be. Theologians have written about “that which none greater can be conceived,” the “Ground of Being,” the “Feeling of Absolute Dependence,” and the “Unmoved Mover.” This poem makes the holy real for me – it is personal, God is incarnate.

The divine is brought to humanity by love. I can know the divine through Jesus – through the humanity of God. I get a glimpse of that love in the children at the schools and in you when I'm with you – even when we're wearing our masks. The love that is yours and the love that is mine unites us to the love that is God – Jesus Christ.

*Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

Love to God and love to all humanity.

The love of God is known in how we love – especially in times like these.

Please stay safe, care for others, and have a blessed Christmas.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, in the birth of your Son you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate Word, and shown us the fullness of your love: help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love that we may know the fullness of his joy; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

God our Creator, in love you sent your Son that the world may have life: lead us to seek him among the outcast and to find him in those in need, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Mele Kalikimaka!

+Bob

The Rt. Rev. Robert L. Fitzpatrick
Bishop, The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai‘i