



ORDINE OSPEDALIERO di
SAN GIOVANNI DI DIO

Rome, 17 December 2012
Prot. N.PG165/2012

CHRISTMAS 2012

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Is 9, 2)

TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE ST JOHN OF GOD FAMILY

My dear Brothers, Co-workers and Friends,

Christmas is a time of joy in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. In an unprecedented act of hospitality, God decided to become man, flesh of our flesh, taking the form of a child who was born in a manger in Bethlehem, the light who shines on and scatters the shadows and dispels the darkness of men and women all over the world, and in all ages.

Through the mystery of the Incarnation which we celebrate at Christmas, God humanised Himself in Jesus, in an act of solidarity with the lives and the destinies of men and women by sharing their limitations and their poverties, not to make them captives to them, but rather to free and save humanity. God, we might say, became human in order to make men and women, His beloved children, become divine.

This was indeed Good News, which we will be commemorating this Christmas, through which our Father renews His commitment and love to the men and women in our world, particularly the most vulnerable, the sick, the poor and the needy.

And not everyone joyfully welcomed the Son of God, the Child of Bethlehem. Many simply did not understand, and many others were totally indifferent. And in this coldness, the new Creature could only find a manger in which to be born, for there was no room in the inn. And this is the plight of so many people today: either they do not know him, or they do not believe that a Child born into a poor family is the light that enlightens a world in which the global crisis, wars, dire poverty, famine and hunger, selfishness, inequality, sickness and death seem to have the last word.

And yet Christmas is a time of joy, light and hope. Let us open up our hearts to the Son of God, as Mary, the Mother of Jesus did when she welcomed Him into her womb and by loving him unconditionally; and as the shepherds did when the angels announced the Good News to them, and like the 3 Kings from the East who followed the star until they found the Child Jesus. All of them were filled with joy and adored Him.

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Let us experience this Christmastide with these thoughts in mind, so that they can help us renew and revitalise our faith, as His Holiness Benedict XVI has urged us to do in the Year of Faith which the Church is currently celebrating. This will enable us to discover and, better still, experience the fact that the Child who was born in Bethlehem is our salvation, the light who can scatter all the shadows and dispel the darkness from our world, the light who can fill the sick and suffering with hope and health, the only light that is capable of healing our wounds and forgiving our sins, the true light that can generate eternal life. With Him, we fear nothing, *“The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?”* (Psalm 26, 1).

I would like this Christmas message of light and hope to reach every part of the Order and of the St John of God Family, and naturally all the sick and the other guests for whom we care every day in our Centres and Services. Our Lord’s hospitality towards His children knows no bounds, and we shall certainly see this over Christmastide if we allow Him to be born in each and every one of us, and in each and every one of our Communities and Centres.

At the door of the stable in Bethlehem, those who came to worship the God Child brought him their gifts. There is no doubt that the best gift that we can offer Him is the gift of hospitality, just as our Founder, St John of God, taught us and practised himself. This is why over this Christmastide we must, if necessary, step up our acts of hospitality towards those who are alone, sick or needy for whatever reason. I am sure that we shall have many opportunities for this. Let us follow the example of the Good Samaritan, who did not pass by, and as St John of God did when he went out of his way to help those in need. This will make Christmas a true light shining in the darkness, and the Son of God will smile, joyfully receiving our humble gift.

I wish all of you, Brothers, Co-workers, Volunteers and Friends of the Order, and the sick and our guests in our Centres and Services, a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year 2013, and also all your loved ones. For all those who will be spending Christmas in our Centres, I wish to offer a special thought: for the sick and their loved ones, I wish that the birth of the Lord will arrive as a light full of hope; to all the Brothers and Co-workers who will be standing by the side of the sick and the guests in our Centres over this period, and especially on Christmas Day itself, I offer my most sincere thanks and my gratitude, because over these coming days you will be, as indeed you always are, the living expression of the hospitality of St John of God.

On behalf of all the members of the General Definitory, and the Community and the Co-workers of the General Curia, I wish everyone a very Happy Christmas, full of light and hope.

Brother Jesús Etayo
Superior General