



## Archbishop LIONGINAS VIRBALAS

Lithuanian Bishops' Conference Delegate for the Lithuanian Catholic Apostolate Abroad

S. Skapo g. 4, LT-01122 Vilnius, Lithuania  
Office: +370 5 212 5455, e-mail: virbalas@sielovada.org

Christmas 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I greet you all as we begin this wonderful Christmas season!

This is a special time of year as we celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, into the world. Each of us looks forward to the holidays with our own experiences. Maybe you have noticed how quickly your children or grandchildren have grown over the year. Perhaps the year has brought personal anniversaries or other significant moments. Sadly, some of you may have lost someone you loved dearly. There were also important events for Lithuania as a whole – the election of representatives to the country's government as well as the celebration of the centenary Song Festival during the summer. Now we approach a new and important year for the Church – the Jubilee Year 2025.

The central message of Jesus' birth is that God "so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Christmas invites us to let this love of God into our lives. Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem twenty centuries ago, He wants to be with us here and now, to open God's infinite horizons to us and to bring joy, peace and hope into our daily lives. Christ's Good News, His love and mercy enrich the life of our nation, with its history, culture and traditions.

Christmas teaches us to be attentive and sensitive. As we look at the small, helpless Baby in the manger, we realise that so much of what occurs in the world does not make the headlines. Jesus was literally born in a cave in Bethlehem, because those around them didn't 'see' the pregnant Mother even as now poor families with children are often overlooked. So let us be considerate of one another, especially of those who are sick, feel lonely, raise children with poor means to support them. Because they are open to new life, families create the world of the future. May they receive every encouragement and support.

Let us not be indifferent to world events. We can't change or influence everything, but we are always able to get involved, to commit ourselves in ways that are available to us: by volunteering, by being part of the community, by helping those in need – whether it's a neighbor, or the people of a country ravaged by war and deprivation. In doing so, we will not only contribute to the wellbeing of the world, but also grow spiritually and enrich our own lives. Much can be done, even with small steps.

A new year, the Jubilee Year 2025, is about to begin. It is a reminder to us that our time and our lives are a gift from God. The theme of the New Year is hope, which is so needed in the world, in Lithuania and in the life of every human being. In announcing the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis said that "the coming Jubilee will be a Holy Year, marked by an enduring hope in God. May it help us to rediscover the necessary trust in the Church, in society, in interpersonal and international relations, in the dignity of every human being and in respect for creation. May the witness of our faith be the leaven of true hope in the world."

It will be meaningful that next year on March 2nd, the Day of Prayer for Lithuanians in the World will coincide with the national pilgrimage of the Jubilee Year in Rome from February 28 to March 4th. On that day, Lithuanians arriving in the Eternal City will enter through the Holy Door and pray in the Basilica of St. Paul outside the city walls. I invite everyone who is able, to participate in this pilgrimage.

I wish you all a beautiful and meaningful celebration of the Nativity of Christ and a joyful, peaceful and hopeful New Year.

Yours in prayer,

Archbishop Lionginas Virbalas, S.J.

Delegate of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference for the Pastoral Care of Lithuanians Abroad