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November 29, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Advent begins this weekend; it is a season rich with anticipation and reflection as we prepare once again to commemorate the birth of the Christ Child. Advent is a sacred time when we prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate the wondrous gift of our Savior, who, out of immense love, chose to take on human form so as to experience our joys and sorrows, and to invite us into an everlasting relationship with Him.

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, we can easily overlook the significance of this season. Advent calls us to slow down and focus on this true meaning of Christmas.

Advent this year will be very special as Pope Francis will open the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica in Rome at the conclusion of Advent on Christmas Eve to begin the 2025 Jubilee Year. United with Bishops throughout the world, I will celebrate Mass on December 29 to begin our own Diocesan Celebration. In his Letter promulgating this Holy Year, our Holy Father reminds us that "…we are called to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind… " (n.10). Do we watch for His presence in our everyday lives? Do we see Him in the faces of our neighbors, colleagues, and those in need? God is always speaking to us—in the laughter of a child, in the kindness of a stranger, and even in the stillness of our own hearts. As Pope Francis writes in his new Encyclical: "Whenever we try to help and care for another person, Jesus is at our side. We should never forget that… He is always there, always at work, sharing our efforts to do good. In a mysterious way, His love becomes present through our service." (*On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ,* n.214) May we heed the words of our Holy Father and be attentive and responsive to these moments, allowing God to transform us from within, and bring His Son's hope to others, particularly those whose crosses are heavy.

As we journey through this season of Advent, I encourage you to share this message of hope and love with those around you. Let your family, friends, and everyone whose life you touch see in you the reflection of Christ's light. Invite them to join you in this sacred preparation, so that together we may anticipate the joy of Christmas with renewed hearts.

May this Advent be a time of deepening faith, and an opportunity to experience the profound love of God. Open your hearts to Him, as He has opened His heart to you. Bring His hope to those in need. May our Advent preparations enable us to be filled with the glory and joy of the Christmas season. Have a blessed and grace-filled Advent!

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Timothy C. Senior

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg