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### **Bishop Toal's Christmas Message 2024**

On the First Sunday of Advent, a phrase from the Reading from St Paul's Letter to The Thessalonians caught my attention – it was “more and more”. In some ways “more and more” may sum up Christmas for many of us - more lights and decorations, more shopping and presents, more parties and festive treats, more songs and entertainment, more gatherings of family and friends. The list can continue and we are very lucky when we can enjoy many of these good things.

Why did St Paul use these words then? Here is what he wrote:

**Brothers and Sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus,  
That, as you received from us, how you ought to walk and please God,  
just as you are doing,  
that you do so more and more.**

It sounds that he recommends making more and more room for Jesus in our lives, so that we can walk and please God in the way Jesus himself and the Apostles taught. We should certainly try to make more room for Jesus at Christmas as we listen again to the great story of his birth at Bethlehem and celebrate it in prayer and in song in our churches, homes, and schools. The true and full celebration of Christmas is a mark of our identity as Christians, and our joy that God became one of us to bring us salvation. In the spirit of St Paul's instruction let us be united in the Lord Jesus this Christmas and, through his grace, draw more and more closer to him, through our prayer and our charity to those more needy than ourselves. By doing this we strive to fully please God as true and faithful followers of Jesus, his Son and Our Lord

On Christmas Night Pope Francis will begin the Jubilee Year of 2025 by opening the Holy Door of St Peter's in Rome. Along with dioceses throughout the world we will begin the Jubilee here in Motherwell on Sunday 29th December, the Feast of the Holy Family. I invite you me to join me that afternoon for the Opening Service, followed by Mass in the Cathedral. Like Christmas, our Jubilee Year will be a period of more and more as we make extra efforts to celebrate and live our faith both at home and on pilgrimage. The theme for the year is Pilgrims of Hope, and as we continue our earthly pilgrimage in our difficult world we do indeed need more and more hope, flowing from our faith in God, and witnessed by our charity as members of Christ's Body.

May the Lord bless you and your families with love and peace this Christmas and may our celebration of his birth bring renewed hope to all in hardship and distress.

**+ Joseph Toal**