

Archbishop Smith: Hampers for Christmas

Christmas is always Christmas. That was the clear message going out from a group of volunteers, who participated in assembling and delivering Christmas hampers to the needy of Sacred Heart Parish of the First Peoples in Edmonton.

Hours were spent on Friday placing in the hampers a variety of necessary items, and Saturday morning was delivery time. I was privileged to be with them Saturday as they met at St. Albert parish in the city of St. Albert (following all pandemic-related restrictions, of course), and to thank and bless them as from there they set off to deliver the parcels.



In this time of pandemic, Christmas celebrations and traditions are far from what they usually are. The reality of lack is experienced by many as very painful, understandably enough. Yet we need to be wary of the temptation that lies within this pain, namely, to be so focused upon our own anxiety and distress that we forget the needs of others. Outreach in charity is an abiding moral obligation for Christians. It is accentuated by the mystery of Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Jesus, given to the world as gift. In the nativity of Jesus Christ, we are shown that the heart of authentic human living is making oneself a gift for the other.

That's what I mean when I say that Christmas is always Christmas. No circumstance, however difficult, can be allowed to obscure the meaning of this sacred time and its call to go out of ourselves, to give of ourselves, to people in need. Those hamper volunteers, as I call them, clearly get this. I could not help but notice in their faces and interactions a real joy. Charitable outreach is an obligation, yes, but it is also a joyful one. The

sounds of joy that heralded the birth of the Christ child are an indication that true joy is found, not by concentrating on our own desires, but by giving ourselves away to help satisfy the needs of others.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation go out to the hamper volunteers. Their generous and joyful action is an encouraging and edifying example to all of us. Of course, my gratitude pales, I am sure, in comparison with that of those who are the recipients of the needed items. Let's keep them, and all who are in need, in our prayers, and ask the Lord to awaken within us a readiness, not only at Christmas but always, to serve them in charity and joy.