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NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE 2023 BY BISHOP LAWRENCE SYDNEY NICASIO

A BLESSED NEW YEAR 2023 FROM ME TO ALL OF YOU!

Yes! It is a new year. It is the New year 2023! Are you just happy that you get to see and to be welcomed into the new year 2023? Is that the only meaning of the new year to you, to us?

As our world becomes 'smaller', we realize that we are closer to each other than we think. The Holy Father reminds us constantly when he prays for the suffering and displaced members of our Common Home—those who suffer in Ukraine, the migrants at the US-Mexico Border...

At home in Belize, I believe that many of us have come to the realization that SELFISHNESS, living focusing on oneself is never the answer for unity and peace in our homes, in our society or in our country. Focusing on oneself and not on the greater good has forced us to chart our own journeys in life, living the way I want, doing things the way I want, deciding for me and me alone and disregarding the effects of our actions on others. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is LOVE. LOVE of God and LOVE of neighbor. Know this, His name is EMMANUEL—God with us!

Many of us have come to realize that we belong to a God who is not about himself, but a God who always puts us sinful children first in everything. He is a God who would not allow us to be alone, but a God who chooses to live among us and to be like us in all things but sin. We ought to realize God's closeness to us and our closeness to each other as God "pikney". Let me remind you what He has told us, "You will be my people and I will be your God".

The experience hurricane Lisa gave us last year, was a powerful reminder that we are powerless when we rely on our own power when confronted by 'Mother Nature'. Looking at our continued recovery, we can say that it was not through selfish means, but through a great trust in God and a spirit of family and oneness where Belizeans and friends serve each other.

It is this Spirit of God and the desire to live as one, one people, one family that I propose to you to hold on to as we begin the new year 2023. It is not enough to thank God for giving us another year and we walk away to do the usual 'me, me and me again' activities that gives no kind of life to self or to others.

How timely the Church is given this opportunity to live in synodality and to make the synodal journey together. In his book, "The Church of Mercy", Pope Francis writes: "The Lord wants us to belong to a Church that knows how to open her arms and welcome everyone, that is not a house for the few, but a house for everyone, where all can be renewed, transformed, sanctified by love—the strongest and the weakest, sinners, the indifferent, those who feel discouraged or lost". (p,31) This is the kind of Church, the kind of family/ people, the kind of country and the kind of world that God wants us to be.

As you have made your plans and resolutions, I pray that your plans/resolutions, and mine will be centered around LOVE around EMMANUEL. I pray, as I continue my recovery journey physically distant from you, that our Church and our homes will open its arms to everyone and not only to a few.

New Year 2023 will be prosperous and fruitful if we choose to allow God to be and live with us wherever we are and wherever we go.

May the Almighty God, our Savior, bless you now and always—**the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!**