



Pastoral Letter for Respect for Life Sunday 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At first I would like to thank all of you who contributed in different ways to the success of the Holy Father's visit. He strengthened us in our Catholic faith and at the same time gave us inspiration to pray and work more consciously for the unity of all Christians. "The coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). The time of Advent is a time of repentance and renewal when we may long more intensely for Jesus Christ. We await the Child which will be born to the world to save it. We empty our hearts from all that prevents us from receiving this Child and following it. We try to become like children ourselves in order to get closer to this Child. This also means that we want to assist and help all those children who suffer. Through the Advent collection by Caritas we want to help those refugee children who most need our help. We mourn all those children who perish on the "sea of death" fleeing together with their relatives. We pray for them, and for all those children who are threatened by not being allowed to be born in our wealthy country. We do what we can to help the children who have taken refuge with us. Christianity is the religion of the Child and of the children. It is a prophetic message in a world where money, careers and power run the risk of becoming more important than little and weak people.

Christianity is the religion of life. Faith gives us hope, when the "culture of death" runs the risk of prevailing. Christ is the risen and living Lord who lives and works in his Church and in his entire world. "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). As the Disciples of Christ we may convey the happy message of the gospel and help realizing it at the very place where we live and act. It is important that we as Catholics – which the Holy Father reminded us of during his visit – work together with all other Christians to assist those in need. "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees" (Isaiah 35:3).

We as Christians must make our voice heard in the society in which we live, and spread the happy message of the gospel to all those who do not know Jesus. We must care for the weak and the forgotten and give a voice to those who do not have one. We have been given the task of proclaiming the inviolable dignity of human life from the very first feeble start in the womb of the mother to the very last panting breath. No person must be deprived of their right to live and be denied their right to live a decent life. Together with all people of good will we must stand up for the God-given value and dignity of all people. We worry about the tendencies of hostility towards foreigners that sometimes appear. The God who was born to us in Bethlehem had to escape to Egypt after a short time. In this way God has identified himself with all refugees. We can see Jesus in each and every one of them and show Him our love in them. In this way they can help us getting closer to God, the God who chose to be a vulnerable, suffering, persecuted person for our sake. But it is also he who has triumphed on the holy wood of the Cross and redeemed all mankind and freed it from the power of sin and evil.

Christianity is the religion of new life. Love is infused into our hearts. The risen Lord shares his eternal life with us in the sacraments of the Church, where we may anticipate in advance some of the glory of eternal life, especially in the Eucharist where the heavenly wedding meal is glimpsed in holy signs. We are given strength by the bread of the angels in order to make life here on earth more like the reality of heaven. We can already now live from this universal brotherhood, where we shall all become one in Christ. We can care for the creation which the Creator has entrusted to us in so that it will preserve its beauty and integrity. We can be his cooperators here on earth, so that it can be a home where everyone can live in peace and justice. Everything and everyone who is alive must get our protection and our help.

During his visit, Pope Francis spoke about the *revolution of tenderness* and the *road of gentleness*. Through his life here on earth, Jesus showed us his tender love and wants us to make the most of it and proclaim it to everything and everyone. He wants to lead us on the road of gentleness and humility, so that we serve our brothers and sisters and lead them to him. In a world where one helps oneself and wants the prime seat, he teaches us put others in the centre and to serve them. On the cross, Jesus entrusted all of us to his mother. More than ever, we need the tender help and powerful protection of the Virgin Mary in order to understand how to live according to Jesus. There is a special aspect of the message of Jesus and of the way of following Him which we can only learn by being close to Mary. Without her something essential in our faith runs the risk of being obscured. Throughout all times she makes herself felt to help us repent more to Jesus. Next year it will be 100 years since the children in Fátima met the Virgin Mary. It is often small and poor children who listen to her more than the big and powerful. Mary inspires us to a deeper repentance and to putting ourselves in the hands of the Lord of life.

Christianity is the religion of eternal life. Again and again we must be reminded that we are called to eternal life. Here on earth we are only on a pilgrimage to practice what we are going to do in eternity: worship and love God. We are reminded about God in every person created in the image of God. In this way we can anticipate a piece of eternity in advance. We can pray for our deceased and assist them on the journey through cleansing to the blessed gazing. Those Holy who have already reached their goal can, in their turn, help us to be more and more transformed by mercy. We live in a boundless reality, where everything that is alive glorifies the God who is creator of all things and wants to redeem everything. Praise and glory to Him for all eternity.

With my prayers and blessings to you all,

Stockholm, on the feast of Christ the King, 20th November 2016

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