



PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT 2018

Dear brothers and sisters in the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm,

At the beginning of Lent we often ask ourselves what we should do so that it may be a time of grace and conversion. We make some good resolutions, but unfortunately they often run out of steam. However, the most important thing is not what we do but what God wants to do for us. As long as we keep our hearts open to God and to his love, then there is already a good chance that Lent will bear fruit in our lives. To convert means precisely to turn one's heart back to God, turn one's eyes to him, let one's ears listen to his word and obey his commandments. Then it becomes quite natural to do with one's hands what is pleasing to him. Paul gives us good advice in today's second reading: "Do everything for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). If God already does so much for us, so shall we also return his love by doing everything to his glory. His love begets our love in return.

We would so like to convert the whole world, bring an end to all evil, violence and sin. But the task is too much for us. Still it is important for us to have a burning desire for God's justice and peace to rule the world. We have to pray earnestly for this. In our own little environment where we live we can do more than we realise to make goodness and truth prevail. When we try to put into practice Paul's advice, "Do everything for the glory of God", then things begin to happen. We become more aware of the words we use. We stop swearing and gossiping and back-biting. We try to use our time well. We do not need to sit at the computer for hours, but we should find time to visit elderly and sick people. We begin to see our work as something which gives glory to God and leads the world to salvation. The more seriously we take those words, "Do everything for the glory of God", the more enjoyable and wonderful our life becomes. Each day is then seen as a gift as we learn to give glory to God in a new way. Every morning has something of Easter morning's splendour and brightness about it. We get a glimpse of the new and eternal life. Every person we meet becomes God's messenger for us. We begin to see other people in a completely different way. Made in the image of God, every person points towards God. We can thank him for so much, if we only open our eyes and hearts, ears and hands to him.

But how can we deal with sin, violence, evil? What we should always remember is that Jesus came precisely to free us and the whole world from all of this. He took our death upon himself and sacrificed himself on the Cross. He died so that we might live. He desires to free us from all evil. This work of salvation takes place always and everywhere. We are constantly given a share in the grace of this salvation, but we have to receive it and let it bear fruit in us. During his life here on earth Jesus did everything to liberate, heal and redeem men and women. In today's gospel we see how he cures a leper of his disease. No one is more interested than Jesus in liberating, cleansing, healing and redeeming men and women. We live in a world that is wounded by sin. We are all in desperate need of Jesus as our Saviour. It is often easier for us to see sin in other people than in ourselves. We can fall into the temptation of looking for scapegoats and thus be infected by the leprosy of xenophobia, hatred of strangers. But if we really allow ourselves to be guided by Paul's exhortation, "Do everything for the glory of God", then we also become more humble. We discover our own need of conversion and God's forgiveness. We see our neighbour's failings on a smaller scale. We become more disposed to deal with our own sins and deficiencies. We are all called to be healed of the leprosy of sin

and to be made holy by the grace of God.

As Christians we always have a responsibility for the environment we live in. God has entrusted creation to us so that we can look after it for his glory. This entails both a concrete responsibility not to misuse nature and a spiritual mission, namely that of allowing God's goodness and truth to penetrate the environment in which we live. Lent is an excellent opportunity for us to consider what we can do to be more moderate in our use of creation. Creation exists for everyone, both those who live now - not least the very poor - and for those who will come after us. If we really do everything for the glory of God, then we also discover another approach to God's creation. We rejoice at all the signs of God's beauty and wisdom that we can perceive there. We try to cooperate with God to make the world a better place for everybody.

Lent is first and foremost a time of preparation for Easter. Easter speaks, or rather sings, about the Resurrection of Christ. The core of our faith is that Jesus Christ has defeated the power of death and sin. He wishes to open his eternal glory to us. Already now through faith, hope and charity we receive a foretaste of this eternal glory. The grace of Easter gives us strength to live in a new and different way. Already now we have a little foot in heaven, since he who is the Head of the Church has risen. Already now he wishes to share this new and eternal life with us, who are members of his body. Faith, hope and charity, the theological virtues, enable us to live deeply united with the Risen One and receive his grace. Moment by moment we can be renewed by this grace. Our great joy is then to please God in everything we are and everything we do. It becomes natural for us to follow God's commandments and live by every word that comes from his mouth. We can put into practice Paul's advice to us during this holy time of Lent: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

With my prayers and blessing for all of you,

Stockholm, 25th January 2018, Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul

Cardinal Anders Arborelius OCD