

Pastoral Letter for Respect for Life Sunday 2019

Dear brothers and sisters in the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm!

The season of Advent is always a time of conversion and renewal. As Christmas draws near, we prepare to receive Jesus Christ on an even deeper level in our hearts. It is his constant wish to come even closer to us and to transform us more and more through his grace. When God chooses to be born into our world as a vulnerable baby, he indicates the inviolable dignity of every single human being, from the first tender moment in the womb until the final breath of life. Through the incarnation, God has solidarised with every human being in his or her unique situation in life. Through the gift of life, he has shown all of us his infinite love and his wish to lead us all to eternal life, which has been opened for us by Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit works unceasingly within us to help us receive the light we need to live our lives to the glory of God, and to communicate his love to our neighbour. Our whole life ought to be a song of praise to the mercy of God, that has been given to us so that we in turn can make him known and loved through our lives as followers of Christ.

Jesus has come with “good news to the poor” (cf. Matt 11). He has a special love for the poor and needy, for those who have no one to defend them or help them. In our environment, it is clear that unborn children are especially at risk. The members of this “invisible people” can often be quietly eliminated without anyone reacting. As Christians we must do all we can to save them. In particular we should try to help those pregnant women who face great difficulties and are in need of our support, so that they can carry their children to term. Here we all need to be a lot more involved. Rather than criticize and judge, we have to show compassion and act like true fellow humans. The same principle applies when people in the final stages of life, feeling that they are of no use to others and suffering severe pain, ask to be helped to die. Palliative care should be a human right available to all who are seriously ill. Everyone should be able to experience human kindness and goodness that can make the last part of one's life more peaceful and harmonious. As disciples of Jesus, we need to show more love for the seriously ill and dying. No one has the right to take the life of another human being. Instead, we must do all we can to make life easier and better for everyone. In that way the voices of those calling out for euthanasia will often be silenced.

Loneliness and isolation seem to be on the increase in our individualistic climate. A person can lie dead in his apartment for three months without anyone noticing. As Christians, we have a huge and important task in this area. In our parishes we need to create a tender family atmosphere, where people strive to take care of one another and help those who feel excluded. There should be home visit teams that try to remain in contact with the sick and elderly. There are always vulnerable groups like refugees and prisoners who need our support. In our often rather anonymous neighbourhoods, we need to do what we can to show kindness and affection.

During Advent, people tend to be more open to the Christian message. Homes are often adorned with an Advent star or candlestick. We should help people see that this light always points to him who is the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. Together with the Virgin Mary who is waiting to bring him into the world, we are waiting for him to be born also in our hearts and those of all men and women. Mary can help us live more profoundly the mystery of the Advent season. “For the mysteries of Jesus are not yet completely perfected and fulfilled. They are complete, indeed, in the person of Jesus, but not in us, who are his members, nor in the Church, which is his mystical body” (St. John Eudes). If we try to take part in the mysteries of Christ, we are drawn closer to him and become more like him. Then we can also share his grace and love with all those we meet, especially the most poor and needy. In that way we can live our whole life united with Jesus' own life. Then we can help people to realize that Jesus wants to lead them through this life and into eternal life, where he wishes to gather us all together. “Eternal life is Christ himself”, says Augustine. Already here on earth each person has received life as a gift from God, in order to grow into a friendship and fellowship intended to last beyond the borders of death. Thus, every human being, no matter who he is or what he has done, must be respected and revered. As Christians, we have been entrusted with the honourable task of getting involved and protecting those who are most threatened and vulnerable, those who have no one but us.

With my prayers and blessings for you all.

Stockholm, the first Sunday of Advent 2019

Cardinal Anders Arborelius OCD