

Pastoral Letter for Lent 2022

People nowadays speak more about euthanasia, assisted dying, than about life assistance. As Christians, we believe that life has prevailed. "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has crushed the power of death. It is our great joy as Jesus' disciples to be able to point to life as a priceless gift that we should cherish and respect. We who have received the favour of being born to life also have the duty and the privilege of defending the inviolability of human life in all respects. At the same time, we are confronted by a culture of death, but this should not deter us from working even more zealously for a civilization of life and love. In following Jesus and with the help of the Spirit, we should proclaim the Good News in word and deed. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58), says Paul, encouraging us to work at the service of life for all who need our help.

The expression life assistance can summarize what our task is in life here and now as Christians. The mission of the Church and her calling is to help us men and women live a good and righteous life in imitation of Jesus, so that we can attain eternal life. The life we have received without our own merit, thanks to the goodness of God and the willing cooperation of our parents, is an invaluable gift that we should cherish. In that way it will be a blessing for us and for everyone we meet - and to the praise and glory of God. Jesus says, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good" (Luke 6:45). He constantly wishes to help us replenish this good treasure, so that we can use it to help our neighbour in all his needs. Let's talk about life assistance! Now in this holy season of Lent, it is important for all of us to let Jesus replenish this treasure. We must give ourselves time for prayer, for Bible reading, for confession and a spirit of penance, and to participate more in the holy Mass now that the churches can open their doors to all of us. We ourselves need spiritual life assistance and a zest for life so that we in turn can help others in their lives. Each of us can then ask God for help, so that we can transmit this life assistance to people near or far. The penance and fasting that we hopefully practice can free us from the tyranny of selfishness - and stinginess - so that we can give life assistance to those who really need our help.

"Every tree is known by its fruit" (Luke 6:44), says Jesus. We have been given life as a gift so that we can bear good fruit. It is not our ideas or opinions that determine whether we become fruitful in the service of life, but what we do. "This is the test of a man" (Sirach 27:7). Throughout our lives, we are put to the test so that the content of our faith and love may be revealed. It is never too late to repent. In His unfathomable mercy, God gives us every moment of our lives as an invitation to convert to a more loving life in His service and that of our neighbour. Let's talk about life assistance! The grace of God is a constant gift, which can renew our inner life moment by moment and enable us to do what is good and true.

"The righteous flourish like the palm tree" (Psalm 92:12). In the lives of the saints we see what God can do in the life of an ordinary person. We are all called to holiness, letting ourselves be transformed by the grace of God and becoming fruitful in the service of life. There is always something we can do to bring the gospel to life and make Jesus' message fruitful in our environment. There is often a greater openness to God in people's hearts than we would imagine. If they see some of Jesus' love in us, then something can be brought to life in them. We can all play our part in this life assistance, which gives life a deeper meaning for people around us. It is not assisted dying that is needed but life assistance. Even the seriously and incurably ill prefer to live, if they receive the life assistance they need, both medically through adequate pain relief, and humanly through tender care and love. It is our calling as Jesus' disciples at the service of life to help them with this. In that way the final days of their lives can be fruitful. Sometimes it is just then that reconciliation and forgiveness can have the last word.

"The potter's vessels are tested in the kiln" (Sirach 27:5). The Divine Potter only creates unique masterpieces. Every human being is created in the image of God, and receives life as a gift so as to bear fruit and radiate some of God's goodness and truth. At the same time, he or she is put to the test throughout the whole of life in everything that happens. Through His grace, God wills to help us deal with all of life's challenges and difficulties. Let's talk about life assistance! We have been given our human freedom in order to choose the right path. We must therefore learn to open ourselves to God's will and receive his guidance. It is the wonderful task of the Church to make this known to us. Let us listen attentively to the voice of the Church when she transmits God's life assistance. In our individualistic age, some find it difficult to accept what the Church wants to communicate. Confusion and all kinds of conspiracy theories are spreading at the speed of lightning. So, let us not grow weary in our prayer and penance during this holy Lenten season! This should become part of our life assistance in order to strengthen the unity of the Church and help all the people of God incorporate the life-giving message of Easter into their lives and put it into practice in the midst of our society, where the culture of death risks breaking through. And let us pray especially for peace in Ukraine.

"Thanks be to God," says Paul, "who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Jesus has truly triumphed on the cross and by his resurrection. The victory of Easter has transformed our whole life. So, let us live inspired by this victory and spread this good news in word and deed. Let us do so during this season of Lent, so that we can offer this life assistance to all those whom God sends along our way.