

Pastoral Letter for the Sunday for Life 2022

Dear sisters and brothers in the Catholic diocese of Stockholm,

Advent is a time of repentance and a new beginning, of expectation and longing for the coming of the Lord. "O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation" (Collect prayer). When God is born in the world as man, he comes in weakness and vulnerability, because the Lord has a special love for the small and the weak, for the humble and the poor. In today's Gospel, Jesus says: "Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Matthew 11:4–5). The message of the Gospel must always be kept alive by our way of living and acting as disciples of Jesus. No matter how weak and insignificant a person seems to be, he must be helped and protected against all evil. We all have a great responsibility, or rather, the wonderful task of taking care of and revering every human being who is born into our world. We can recognize and encounter Jesus in every person.

Being *Pro-life* does not primarily mean being against anything, but rather being in favour of life and of everyone's right to live. As Catholic Christians, in our time and environment, we have a special calling, though unfortunately we often seem to be the only ones standing up for it. Time and again, we have to stay firm and try to explain that human life is inviolable and should be protected from the first tender moment in the womb to the last gasping breath. God has given us life as a priceless gift. The right to life is the first and most important of all human rights. Without it, other human rights lose their meaning. No one can be denied that right. Almost everyone knows that the Catholic Church is against abortion and euthanasia. At the same time, we Catholics should do everything we can to support women who feel anxiety at the prospect of letting their children be born. In a similar way, in caring for the dying we should strive to make the last stage of their lives as tolerable and beautiful as possible.

Being *Pro-life* means trying to take care of every person, whoever they are and whatever they have done, and to make life as nice and beautiful as possible for that person. Pope Francis urges us again and again to ensure that the unborn may in fact be born. At the same time, he reminds us that this also implies a responsibility of taking care of those who are going through a difficult moment, so that they can have a better life in every way. We can sometimes be tempted to feel powerless in the face of all the human suffering around us. That is when we have to wake up. It is then we can realize that there is always someone who can experience God's love and care through us. It is one of life's greatest joys when we become aware that God wants to use us to spread his love to someone who would otherwise never experience his love or ours.

Being *Pro-life* means that we should take care of all creation, protecting life in all its forms. God has entrusted all creation to us men and women, but that also means that we have a responsibility to protect its beauty and integrity. Those who are born after us will

need nature and the environment to be preserved intact, so that they can survive. We cannot play out the right to human life against the life of nature. Caring for and respecting the environment and climate is a prerequisite for the continued existence of humanity. Animals and plants also have a right to exist. Sometimes in fact animals can be a model and inspiration for us, by the way they look after their offspring, in good times and bad.

Being *Pro-life* means that we have a responsibility and a calling to make life in society as good and just as possible. Catholic social teaching gives us guidance and insight into how we can influence society, so that we can all take better care of our brothers and sisters who suffer in different ways. A just social order gives the least fortunate and vulnerable the opportunity to lead a dignified life. As Catholic Christians, we should always try to apply the Church's social teaching to daily care for those who are most in need. Every person has the right to a good and dignified life. At the same time, we know that there are almost always groups of people who risk being excluded in one way or another. When we meet them we as disciples of Jesus have the prophetic mission of standing up for them, regardless of who they are or what they have done.

Being *Pro-life* is never easy. Because of our opposition to abortion, we are considered by many to be "reactionaries, misogynists" or even worse. As followers of Jesus who care about refugees and beggars, we can be accused of being "Sweden haters" or at least of being naive and unpatriotic. But it is always a privilege to endure insults and ridicule for the sake of Jesus, because we take the Gospel words about the dignity of life very seriously. Our faith and love would be weak if we were not prepared to suffer in some way for Jesus and his message.

Being *Pro-life* is always wonderful. We should thank God for the gift of life. We should trust that he will one day give us a share of eternal life. We are called to live in communion with him and share in his divine glory. Even now our lives can be transformed and lit up by God's light. Ever since God became man, wanting to share our life, human life has acquired an even deeper dignity and beauty. God becomes one of us in order to look after each person and show them His grace and goodness. It is our great task and that of the whole Church to help people discover this deep dimension of life. We are all called to participate in one way or another in this evangelization, so that each person can discover what a great treasure God has given us through the grace and gift of life. We should therefore never deny anyone the possibility of being born into this world and ultimately receiving a share in eternal life. We should do all we can so that everyone can share in the gift of life that the God of life wants to bestow on us all, so that we may one day share eternal life with Him.

With my prayers and blessing, Stockholm 21.11.2022, +Anders Arborelius OCD