

PASTORAL LETTER FOR SANCTITY OF LIFE SUNDAY 2024

"Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4), dear sisters and brothers in the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm. Every time we hear the glad tidings proclaimed in the liturgy; we are reminded that Jesus Christ has been born into our world to save us. The power of sin and death is broken. Life has conquered. God has already now opened the door to eternal life. In the midst of ordinary life, we get a glimpse of the eternal glory that God desires to share with us. Even now we are invited to share the full joy that always meets us in the Lord. Whatever happens in our own life and in the life of the whole world, we must remain in this joy. It is not an emotional joy but a deep conviction of God's constant love and grace that never fails us. This gift makes us ask, "What then shall we do?" (Luke 3:10). When it really dawns on us what God has done for us, it becomes quite natural for us to respond to his call with love. Through our prayer and our deeds, we wish to correspond with great joy to the love of God, who grants us the gift of life and wants to share his eternal life with us.

"Keep our prayer and our longing burning, so that we may receive the joy you prepare for us and see how Christ takes shape in us" (*today's Opening prayer*). Gratitude for everything God gives us strengthens our joy, a joy that we wish to share with all who remain in darkness and in the shadow of death. How often Pope Francis has urged us to strengthen the culture of life in the midst of a time of war and conflict. One of the biggest tragedies of our times is that people do not want to open themselves up to the gift and culture of life. Again and again, one hears the voices of those who emphasize the importance of the so-called right to abortion. They even want to have it written into the constitution, as if the most important human right would be to deny others their right to life. While striving to strengthen the so-called the right to abortion, they also want to restrict the right to asylum and make life difficult for people in need. I often meet people in our parishes who are not allowed to remain in our country but have to return to an uncertain future.

The Church always wishes to be a home where every person, regardless of who he or she is, can be welcomed with joy. Through its social teaching, the Church invites us to be a leaven in society, so that reverence and respect for the inviolability of life may be strengthened. Every child who has been conceived has the right to be welcomed into our world. If a pregnant woman is facing great difficulties, it is our Christian duty to help her, so that she can give birth in a safe environment. It often turns out that a woman who has an abortion does so reluctantly and she would like to keep her child, if she could only receive support at various levels. We pray for all women who find themselves in this predicament, so that they receive both divine and human help. It is a great joy for me when I hear that a woman has been helped in this way, so that she may rejoice in the child she

has given birth to. We have to grow in mutual solidarity and care, so that everyone who feels unwelcomed, whether unborn children or refugees, may be welcomed by us. "What then shall we do?" many people ask. The answer is simple and obvious when we truly live as disciples of Jesus, rejoicing always in him. That leads us to do all we can to share our joy with those who would otherwise be rejected or killed. In that way Paul's words come true: "Then shall the peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7).

The culture of death has its own language. One talks about the right to abortion. One talks about euthanasia. One talks about assisted suicide. Therefore, we need the language of life, the language of joy and love, more than ever. "Rejoice in the Lord always... There is no need to worry" (Phil 4:4, 6). We have been given life as a priceless gift from God. We in turn can make our whole life a gift to him, so that everything we do may be done for his praise and glory and for the joy and benefit of our neighbour. Unfortunately, there are many people in our country, not least among the young, who suffer from a kind of collective depression and do not see a deeper meaning in life. Mental illness, addiction problems and crime are spreading among young people. They need the joy that can only come from God, who grants us life as a gift. We should all be able to do a lot more to help those who grow up in our country.

"Have no fear. The Lord your God is in your midst" (Zeph 3:16-17). God has created each man and woman in his own image. "Every human being possesses an infinite dignity ... which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state or situation the person may ever encounter" (*Dignitas infinita, no. 1*). God wants to live in us as in a holy temple. When we were baptised, the Holy Trinity began to dwell in us. At every moment of our lives, we can worship God within us. In every person we can revere the God who has created them and desires to live in them. If we look at our fellow men in this way, we grow in reverence for them. We cannot think of harming them or depriving them of the life that God has given them. Every person is unique and is called to a unique personal relationship with God. We have to thank God that he has made us so wonderfully, instead of being dissatisfied with what we are and wanting to be remade into something else. It is so easy nowadays to get stuck in a culture of dissatisfaction instead of thanking and praising the Lord who has created us and everything around us so marvellously.

When we celebrate the Sanctity of Life Sunday, we can rejoice in the gift of life and give thanks to God who has wanted to share our life by becoming man. In this way he has sanctified the life of every human being and instilled in us a longing to live our whole lives in communion with him. It is

this personal communion of life with Jesus Christ that gives life its full depth and joy. At the same time, we have to pray to him who is the Prince of Peace to grant his peace to all those who live in the shadow of war. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to work for peace and reconciliation, for the good of all, for the salvation of all.

Stockholm, 21.11.2024 With my blessing, +Anders Arborelius OCD