

Pastoral Letter for Lent 2025

Dear sisters and brothers in the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm!

“Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). Jesus has triumphed by rising from the grave for our sake. The message of the Resurrection is clear and distinct. Only in the risen Lord can man find what he is longing for in the depths of his being. At the same time, the Easter message is so overwhelming that some people have difficulty in accepting that it is true. We are constantly reminded of suffering, war, oppression and many other terrible events that can make it difficult to trust the Easter message. We therefore need Lent and Passiontide as an important preparation and pathway leading us onwards to Easter and the Resurrection. We are given time to reflect on how God takes up the fight against the negative aspects of life and against the shadows in our own lives. By taking on the horrors of the cross, Jesus shows us how far God goes in his solidarity with suffering humanity. Only by sharing our darkness, our struggles and our vulnerability can God convince us of his boundless love and compassion for all suffering people all over the world. They are the ones he wants to guide towards the morning of Easter and the Resurrection.

If we faithfully take on the sacrifices of Lent trying to free ourselves from our attachment to material things and from our longing for pleasures and enjoyments, we can accompany Jesus on his way of the cross. By serving the poor and needy, we can grow in ever closer communion with Jesus who came to serve and not to be served. We are always invited to live in an ever deeper relationship of love with Jesus. Our heart can become more and more like his sacred heart, which was pierced on the cross through love for us poor sinners. He wants to transform us, self-absorbed individualists, into good and generous human beings. Is it really possible? If we look into our own hearts, it all seems a little dark and hopeless. But if we look at Jesus and the saints, we understand that there is always hope. “A good person brings forth good things out of the good treasure of his heart” (Luke 6:45).

How can we have such a heart with a good treasure? Lent is here to help us along the way. Jesus wants to teach us to follow him faithfully. He wants to guide us through life, to shape our way of thinking, how we react and what we do. He wants to free us from the blindness of sin. “Can the blind lead the blind?” (Luke 6:39), Jesus asks. We must choose the right path, choosing to reject blind leaders and false ideologies. We receive the Spirit’s help to become firm in faith, hope and love. “Therefore, stand firm and unwavering..., giving yourselves fully to the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). We listen to Jesus’ words in the Gospel. We receive him in all his reality in confession

and the Eucharist. We serve him in everything we think and do. We remain in him, whatever happens and however much we may feel it - or don't feel it. May he enlighten us with his message of joy, so that our good treasure is filled more and more. Then we may pour out our good treasure and share it with everyone the Lord sends along our way.

Fasting and self-denial, almsgiving and works of mercy become more important than shopping and computer games. We can get rid of all the unnecessary pastimes and distractions that modern society specializes in offering us and that prevent us from opening ourselves to God's presence in ordinary life. With God's grace, we can cut off all ties to sinful and selfish needs. We can replace mobile phones and smartphones with Bibles and prayer books. Social media that previously enslaved us can release their stranglehold on us and we learn to realize that they are often antisocial and can make us quarrelsome and prejudiced. Sirach seems to have already sensed this in some way: "The wretchedness of man is evident when he argues... man is tested by argument" (Sir 27:4-5). The discussion that was aimed at belittling others and their perceptions is instead transformed into dialogue and into openness to the Spirit who wants to lead us all into the whole truth. Truth has a greater chance of having an effect when it is conveyed in a thoughtful and loving way. We must first remove the beam from our own eye in order to help our brother get rid of the splinter in his eye.

Once Lent has led us ever more deeply to encounter and follow the suffering and crucified Lord, we are led almost spontaneously to the empty tomb. We have been emptied of all unnecessary material attachments. The victory of the Resurrection can be received in an open and receptive heart. Without really noticing how great and transformative it is, we receive Jesus who has now been glorified and risen. In silence and adoration we can fall down before the Risen One. We need the fifty days of Easter time to penetrate the Paschal mystery and be transformed by it. The forty days of Lent have prepared us and freed us from everything that prevented us from living in deep union with Jesus Christ. By sharing his labours and sufferings, we have grown in constant communion with him. The more we have become at home in this communion, the more we can then open ourselves to the victory of the Resurrection. We learn to live the whole mystery of Christ together with the whole Church. The Cross and the Resurrection become a single reality of Christ that leaves its mark on everything in our lives. The good treasure in our hearts is filled to overflowing. We can share all of this with all those who suffer and are burdened, hunger and thirst and grope their way in darkness and uncertainty. Jesus has suffered, died and risen for them, but someone must be able to enlighten them about this. Who would it be if not us! During this Jubilee Year, we are invited to become "pilgrims of hope" precisely to spread the message of the resurrection to those who need it

most. As catholics in Sweden, we all have this calling to evangelization, each in our own way. It is a great joy when we discover our own personal calling and the opportunity to spread the message of Easter. We can only thank God for showing us this trust.

With my blessing and prayers,

+Anders Arborelius ocd

Stockholm, January 25, 2025, Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul