

Where Christ is alive, sin is dead! Pastoral Letter for Lent 2019i

Dear sisters, dear brothers,

I look forward to entering with you this Lenten season. Yes, I am rejoicing, since these 40 days of preparation for the Easter celebration lead us in a particularly intense way to become aware of what constitutes the heart of our Christian life: the deep and faithful love towards God and mankind.

Therefore, let us ask ourselves honestly, what are the conscious and unconscious obstacles that prevent us from living this love. Then we will recognise the areas of the shadows where we need, as individuals and as a Church, a conversion in the sense of a real inner turn-around.

An authentic conversion process is out of necessity something painful because it makes us look our sinful state in the face. In the end, however, it leads us to a renewed and living relationship with the Lord and with our sisters and brothers, a relationship which is then a source of happiness.

As you know, for the Church, the last weeks were not marked with the sign of joy, but with the seal of shame. We have faced the truth: some members of the clergy have seriously abused children and young people. I wholeheartedly condemn these crimes, which must be denounced to the civil justice system. It is filled with shame that I ask for the forgiveness of the victims. I assure you that we will do everything we can to minimise the likelihood of these criminal acts happening again.

Through the example of the abuse scandal, so often passed over in silence, we Christians can realize the destructive and perverse power of sin. It signifies a serious and wounding rupture, which has consequences in the life plans of a person, disfigures the view of the holiness of God and hurts the body of Christ horrifically.

Sin is at the service of death. It degrades the human being, it denies the greatness and goodness of the Lord and destroys the credibility of the Church. In doing so, it is in direct contradiction with all that Christ has offered to the world: life and salvation. Sin, in all its forms, is never something trivial and we must never minimise it.

If, at present, we renew ourselves internally through meditation, penance, self-denial, prayer and confession, it is more than mere respect for traditional Lenten practice. It is a tried and necessary way to get rid of sin and put us back into the service of life. The Lord's desire is that mankind should live well. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God tells us: "I do not take pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather that he turn from his behaviour and lives" (Ez 33,11).

By converting us, the time of Lent is a privileged time to accomplish the will of God more consciously. In the prayer of the Our Father, we make the request that the will of God be fulfilled and thereby that man should live.

There are many whose life choices are strongly constrained, or even destroyed by poverty, disease, environmental destruction, discrimination, persecution and many other reasons. As Christians, our mission is also to support and defend them. Our support organisation "partage.lu" (formerly Bridderlech Deelen) wants to help the weakest so

that they "stay alive" and offer the strength of solidarity to oppose the sin of injustice. I thank you for all the support for their projects. I also share my concern for our parish communities, which I also hope will stay alive.

In addition to the care given to personal and community prayer and to the celebration of the Eucharist, the introduction of catechesis in the parish plays an important role. I warmly thank all the titular and volunteer catechists, all the parents, the pastoral workers and the priests and deacons who have committed themselves to this mission. Catechesis concerns us all because it offers to men and women of all ages entry into intimacy with Jesus Christ. It offers a deep and personal relationship with Jesus, without which any authentic Christian and ecclesial life is impossible. Where Christ is alive, sin is dead!

The opportunities for getting involved in catechesis are not lacking: you can join in with "catechesis for all", helping with group animation, testifying to your faith, supporting youth ministry, promoting a true "culture of welcome" for those seeking to reconnect with the Church or to discover it, the possibilities are numerous. If Christ is alive in us, then to testify to his love becomes an affair of the heart! How great is our joy to see faith grow in the hearts of young and old.

In addition to the liveliness of our communities of faith, many are also concerned about the sustainability of our places of worship. Given the new legislation around the use and funding of our churches and chapels, we need more than ever more support from everyone so that they can continue to fulfil their purpose. In this, I count on your generosity.

If we look at the reality, we also know that we do not have the means to maintain all the churches. Sooner or later we will begin here a painful process, at the end of which we will have to mourn for some of the churches we care about. Although deconsecration can only be the last possible resort once all other avenues have been exhausted, it cannot be avoided in all cases, whether in the short or long term. Those involved in the new *Kierchefong* will explore possible outcomes. They can count on my support and I express my deep thanks for their sometimes difficult mission.

Dear sisters, dear brothers,

We are now witnessing profound changes in the Church and society. In order for us to accompany and be co-creators in this process with a positive spirit, we need to be permanently connected to the Lord of the Church. It is from him alone that the meaning and purpose of everything comes. Let us pray with our patron saint, the Consoler of the afflicted, that the will of the Lord may be fulfilled in everything. It is from his will that we draw our life. May the Lord help us to fulfil it and may my episcopal blessing encourage you.

Jean-Claude Hollerich
Archbishop of Luxembourg

Luxembourg, February 22, 2019, on the feast of the Saint Pierre Chair

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