**MESSAGE FROM BISHOP NOËL SIMARD FOR LENT 2023**

**WALKING TOGETHER TOWARDS EASTER**

To walk together in this journey towards Easter that is Lent, is a call of great relevance. In fact, since October 2021, at the request of Pope Francis, we have entered into a synodal process which aims to stimulate us to walk together in our common mission to bring the Good News to our world and to build the Kingdom of God. We are also called to resolutely take the path of conversion in this context of threat and fear caused by wars, pandemics, inflation and disasters such as the terrible earthquake in Turkey and Syria. Our Christian communities also need to be challenged in the face of the exhaustion of the vital forces and the lack of new people to take over. The temptation is great to fall into a state of pain, boredom, despondency linked to a lack of motivation, weariness, disenchantment and even discouragement. Hence the need to walk together to regain the strength, courage, zeal and joy of the missionary disciples that we must be.

Walking together! To walk is to go forward, with our eyes fixed on Christ, and to refuse the treadmill of a comfortable life. To walk is to take the path of renewal by letting Christ transform us and free us from what holds us captive. To walk is to go out to join our brothers and sisters who are hungry for peace, justice, solidarity and love, and with them, to make the life of the Risen One burst forth.

To walk together! Together, because no one is saved alone and without God and because we are all in the same boat of the Church that sails with the certainty that Christ's Passover gives victory over death. Together, we support each other in prayer, fasting and almsgiving. "Fasting prepares the ground, prayer irrigates it, charity fertilizes it" (Pope Francis). Indeed, **fasting** frees us from the greed of material goods and creates space for God and the other in our hearts. **Prayer** leads us to this gushing source of God's Life, which happens by listening to His Word, by being silent to hear His voice, by joining our brothers and sisters in the praise and thanksgiving of the Eucharist, by not forgetting to live the sacrament of forgiveness, sacrament of reconciliation and peace. Finally, **almsgiving** makes love circulate within us, making it a gift, sharing, service and mutual aid, giving hands that are active and in solidarity with people who live in precariousness, poverty, loneliness or who are afflicted by illness, violence or by disasters that strip them of everything. During this Lenten season, let us support more than ever those organizations that dedicate time, personnel and resources to respond to the urgent needs and necessities of life of these people, and that are already crying out to us in despair from the thousands of victims of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

May our journey towards Easter help us to walk together; may it transform us and give us the momentum to continue to commit ourselves and stand firm in hope, joyful and confident that Jesus walks with us and guides us in the light of the resurrection.