

MESSAGE FROM + NOEL SIMARD, BISHOP OF VALLEYFIELD, FOR LENT 2021

WHY LIVE LENT THIS YEAR?

Why live Lent this year? For months and almost a year, we have been experiencing a form of Lent, especially fasting. In fact, the pandemic and its restrictions have forced us to fast: fasting for relationships, outings, travel, family and friends, fasting for entertainment, fasting for Eucharist and communion, etc. Why undertake this period of forty days of penance when we have been in quarantine for so long? Wouldn't this be the time to come out of isolation, to have occasions for rejoicing and to go out to meet the other person to give him or her a new embrace of tenderness and love! Even if all this is true, Lent remains essential, even after a time of deprivation that has "paralyzed" our vital spirit.

Lent, which is not only a time of fasting and penance, offers us the possibility of renewal in faith, hope and love. It is a time of conversion and renewal of our vision, a journey towards Easter that invites us to walk in the footsteps of Christ with greater boldness and resolution. Already under the spotlight of the light of Easter, Lent comes to enlighten our choices, our feelings and our attitudes, so that our lives may be further transfigured and flooded with the light of Christ. Through fasting as an experience of deprivation, I am called, again in 2021, to rediscover God's gift, to recognize my poverty and my need for God, to accept His love and to share it with others, especially with those who are deprived of love and happiness or who expect a word and a gesture of consolation from us. I strip myself of what encumbers me and holds me captive, of what prevents me from sharing with those in need. Through prayer, I open myself to the greatness of God's Love and to His truth in order to reveal the truth in me, to verify the authenticity of my faith, my hope and my charity. Through prayer, I fill up with trust: trust in God, in His Word, in the other, in the future. In the context of uncertainty and anxiety created by the pandemic, prayer brings the strength to continue walking on the road and to glimpse a horizon illuminated by God's sun and crossed by the rainbow of the covenant with God, with the other, with creation. There is a future and God, in Jesus, continues to accompany us on the path of reconciliation with Him, with ourselves, with our brothers and sisters and with Mother Earth whom we have mistreated by our unbridled search for consumption. To live this fourfold reconciliation, in its wisdom, the Church offers us the sacrament of forgiveness and peace.

During Lent, many will receive the vaccine against Covid-19, a vaccine that will provide protection and reduce the spread. Even if the comparison is "lame", Lent is also a time to receive the "vaccine" of God's love, life and charity. It is offered to us to protect us from selfishness, self-sufficiency and apathy in the fight against injustice and misery. It is offered to us to receive the Living Water and the Spirit that Jesus offers us in abundance in the paschal mystery. Indeed, the Spirit makes us drink to the love that springs from the Father's heart so that we may then communicate it to our brothers and sisters, especially to those who live in poverty and precariousness. This is the meaning and purpose of almsgiving.

The pandemic has created painful conditions of loneliness, anguish, suffering and destitution. We have not finished suffering the consequences and harmful effects of this crisis. If we are called to discern the presence of Christ in our lives and in our world, we also have to be signs of this Presence through renewed and increased giving, sharing and solidarity. And this must be done not only to the members of our families or our country who have been sorely affected by the crisis, but also to our brothers and sisters around the world, especially those in Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, Africa, South America, to name but a few. Pope Francis offers us a simple and effective way to live this universal solidarity that goes beyond the family circle or that of our country. It is about seeing the other in need, the other living far away or perceived as a stranger. It is about seeing him as a member of his family, as a friend, as a brother or a sister. This is how closeness, so dear to Pope Francis, will be lived in all its truth

and strength. It is with this spirit that we are invited to live Share Lent by generously supporting international aid organizations such as Development and Peace.

Once again this year, I am committed to living Lent and to following this journey of conversion and renewal with Christ and in the Church, who assure me of their presence and accompaniment in this Ascent to the life, joy and light of Easter.

Have a good Lent!