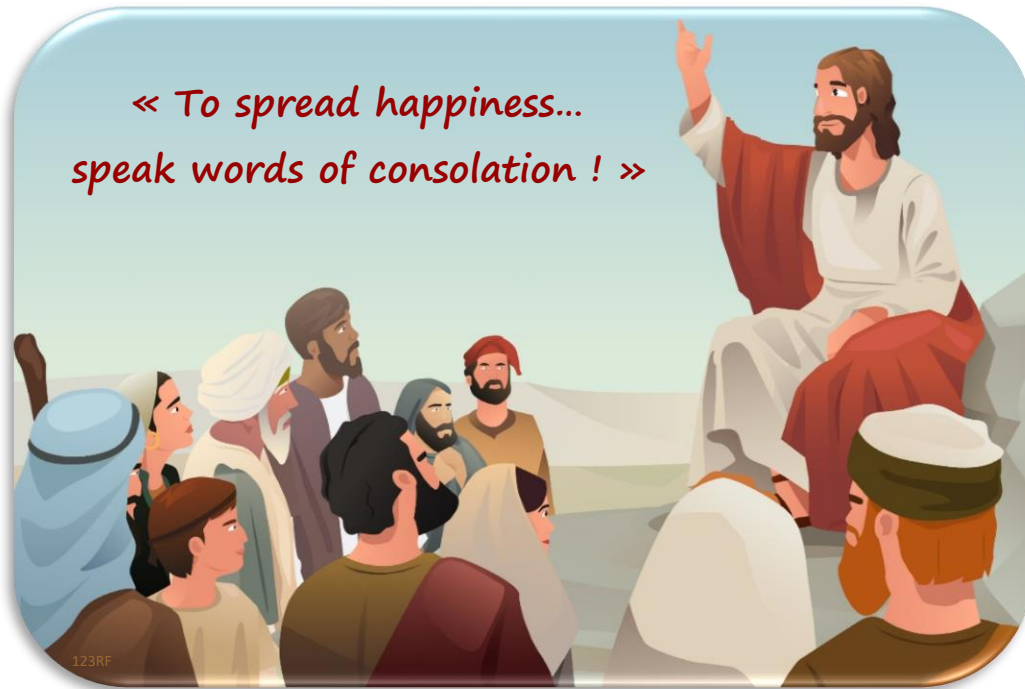


MESSAGE FROM YOUR BISHOP NOEL FOR THE PASTORAL YEAR 2020-2021



Dear Diocesan Members,

For the past three years, we have centered our action and our pastoral life on the Church by stepping out and on the need to reach out to our brothers and sisters who live on the periphery of our world, of our Church, of our hearts. We were invited to go out with faith, with hope, with charity. This year and for the next two years we will continue to work as missionary disciples to be an outgoing Church. But this time, our reflection and action will be guided and established by this charter of the Kingdom of God which is the Beatitudes set forth by Jesus.

To be happy is a fundamental and universal aspiration. At the service of human happiness, the Beatitudes express and put into practice that love of God and love of neighbour which in the Gospel are only one love. If we wish to attain true happiness, we are called to put ourselves at the school of the Master who proposes the Beatitudes to us as a path of conversion and holiness.

For the pastoral year 2020-2021, our theme will be: "To spread happiness, speak words of consolation" in reference to the beatitude of tears: "Blessed are the afflicted, for they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:5). Some people express uneasiness in the face of this beatitude because, they say, it encourages submission in trials or resignation in the face

of suffering and evil. Tears, as such, are not to be sought, but suffering exists: day after day, night after night, a long complaint rises from the earth. We may believe that we are preserved from tears, but we cannot deny the tears of others. As Pope Francis reminds us, "the world does not want to cry; it prefers to ignore painful situations, to hide them, to conceal them". The COVID-19 pandemic that has shaken the whole world has brought us face to face with the drama of suffering and evil. We cannot hide the reality and escape the painful situations caused by the pandemic: job losses, confinement that has created isolation and anguish, the death of loved ones, etc. We cannot hide the reality and escape the painful situations caused by the pandemic. By forcing us to face the tears and suffering of others, the pandemic has also led us to develop more compassion and solidarity. Indeed, by allowing ourselves to be pierced by the pain of others, by crying in our hearts, by understanding the anguish of thousands of brothers and sisters in humanity, by approaching others until we touch their wounds, we have learned that we are united in a common suffering and that deep down the distances are blurring.

Tears are related to evil, and especially to the evil caused by sin. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus won victory over sin. And during His earthly life Jesus healed countless people who were afflicted and offered them the consolation they sought, the healing of their hearts. For Jesus, the healing of bodies is only a sign of a deeper healing, namely the salvation of souls. If there are tears to be shed, they are tears of repentance. Like the sinful woman who entered the house of Simon the Pharisee to weep (Luke 7:38), like Peter who "wept bitterly" (Mt 26:75) after denying Jesus. Let us weep for our sin that has wounded God's love.

Affected deep down by the evil that physically or morally overwhelmed so many people, Jesus touched the blind man to restore his sight, the paralytic to put him back on his feet, the deaf-mute to free the word and restore communication, his friend Lazarus to give him back his life. And to continue his work, Jesus needs us. The consolation promised by Jesus comes through our commitment to eradicate disease, poverty, injustice and anguish. Faced with the immensity of the task, we can lose heart. We see better than ever the injustice that oppresses the poor, the persecutions that torture consciences, the migrations that uproot so many families; we see wars, lies, domestic and family violence, natural and human catastrophes such as the explosions in Beirut. We know and see all this and we can do almost nothing; we are powerless to alleviate all this misery. Resignation and desolation are useless. We must act. Christ has taken upon himself all the sufferings of humanity and wants us to take them and share them, one by one, through him and with him. It is up to us to hear the cry that rises from so many breasts, to bring light in the darkness and to offer meaning in love. Tears are not useless. This illness, this mourning, this failure, this agonizing uncertainty about tomorrow, this inhuman loneliness, this seemingly stupid accident, this decay or deterioration of body or

mind, all this is not lost and serves, as long as we find in it a meaning that enlightens and a presence of love that supports, comforts and enlarges the heart. Suffering, no longer for oneself, but for others. Taking up one's cross, every day, is impossible for a disciple of Christ, if it does not contain the cross of others. Moreover, it is by crying with those who are crying that many have discovered the meaning that God wants to give to their own tears and sorrows.

Finally, the tears of this beatitude undoubtedly refer to the tears shed following the death of a loved one. The pandemic has taken the lives of so many people who were close to us or became close to us through social networks. These tears are explained by the bonds of affection or friendship with the deceased and raise the question of why the separation. Without alleviating the pain of separation, our faith offers the hope of eternal happiness and reunion in God's dwelling place. Even within the sorrow of absence springs the joy of the regained presence, for "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:3-4).

In this pastoral year, let us spread happiness by struggling against the evil caused by sin, both in us and around us; let us be comforters through our words, our actions and our whole being; with Jesus, let us work for the healing of broken hearts and the consolation of so many grieving families. Let us allow ourselves to be touched by the tears of others and dare to touch their wounds. As a hymn by Michel Scouarnec says so well:

*"If suffering has made you cry tears of blood,
you will have washed your eyes.
Then you will be able to pray with your brother on the cross".*

To spread happiness, may the consoling Spirit guide and enlighten us and may Mary our Mother come to our aid!

+ Noël Aimard
+ Noël, bishop

