



Pastoral Letter for Life Sunday 2011

Advent is a joyful time waiting for the arrival of the Saviour. We long for God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. Advent is also the time for God's longing and waiting for every human being to accept His grace and love and be transformed by it. Our expectant longing for God is but a weak echo of the passionate longing that God has - that we will accept the good tidings, so that we in our turn can evangelize in words and deeds. "God became man so that man could be divinized," the Church Fathers used to say to summarize Christianity. These words are especially relevant for us during Advent. God wants to come to earth to share our earthly lives with us so that we in turn can share His eternal life. We need to live in imitation of Jesus and be led by Him if we are to share in His eternal glory. It is a great joy when we understand that we are invited to live perpetually *in* Christ and *with* Christ, to *follow* Christ and act *through* Christ for the sake of Christ. St. Augustine has a beautiful text, where he lines up these prepositions to show that joy is increased when we discover ever new ways to open our lives for Christ and to receive his love.

When we celebrate Life Sunday, it is precisely because we believe that every human being's life from its first delicate beginning to the last breath is a life that Jesus Christ wants to share. He wants to save every one of us, and to follow us throughout our lives. Nothing in our lives is insignificant for Him. Everything in our lives can help us to come closer to Him. Through creation our dignity is inviolable and when we open ourselves to Jesus, we begin to understand the full extent of the mystery of our call. "... *There is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me,*" (Jn 1:26-27) says John the Baptist. These words are just as relevant today, when so many do not know Jesus, but He knows them and wants to save them. He lives among us, unknown and hidden from the eyes of the world, while He longingly waits for all to accept Him. Jesus has identified Himself with the unknown and unappreciated among us. He wants to receive our love and care in and through them. We can show Him our love when we reach out a helping hand to those in need of our support. Our eternal blessedness is dependent on whether we have recognized Him among the hungry, naked and imprisoned, in all those who need our love and help. It is one of life's great joys when we meet Jesus in one of our needy neighbours.

There is a sanctuary in Valencia dedicated to **Nuestra Senora de los Desemamparados**, Our Lady of the Defenseless. Our Lady can help us to recognize her Son in the forsaken people we meet. Who then are the defenseless and in most need of our love in our society? When we celebrate Life Sunday we always think of the unseen and unknown people, the unborn who are dependent on our good will to come into the world. None are more defenseless than them. When one disdains the dignity of human life during one phase of life then one disdains the whole human being, nay the dignity of all humanity.

Lately, we have been confronted by the tragic fact that the human dignity of the sick and elderly is not respected. It is only right that there is indignation on account of the neglect suffered by the elderly. Here all of good will must cooperate to find a solution. This is not just a structural problem but also a challenge to each one of us, as the neglect is often caused by the lack of a neighbour, a relative or friend who can be a support for the elderly. Parents are usually involved in the wellbeing of their children in the day care center and school, but children and relatives are not as keen to stand by their elderly in the old people's homes. Each one of us must take stock and see what we can do so that the elderly receive humane treatment at the end of life.

Another group of the defenseless are the victims of trafficking whose numbers seem to be growing. This modern form of slavery is found here. *Caritas*, in recent years has been in contact with about seventy women who have fallen into the clutches of the sex trade. Sometimes, one is lucky enough to help them but the need is enormous. These women have often been abused in the most awful way. Every society is judged by how it treats the vulnerable. Our credibility as Christians is put into question if we do not try to help the vulnerable for this obnoxious crime. It is, therefore, one of the most urgent areas for our domestic involvement, which *Caritas* is trying to get started in all our parishes. As the disciples of Christ, we are called upon to care for those who no one else is caring for. The love of Christ forces us to walk in His footsteps. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI wishes that the work of *Caritas* will be important for the whole Church and for every Catholic.

It is a part of the Church's evangelization to help the needy no matter who they are. We must all try to figure out how we can deepen our involvement. It is not enough to light an Advent candle. We must, ourselves become a light for those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death; we must walk in the footsteps of Him who "*came to testify to the light.*" (John 1:8) Then our joy will be complete because we will contribute to spreading the good news that the Word was made flesh. God has become man in Jesus Christ so that He can come close to every human being and save him. When we allow ourselves to be loved, we want to live like Him, act like Him, and love like Him. We want to return His love by showing His love to every human being that He sends our way. We then discover - to our surprise - that we ourselves are able to receive even more love in a deeper union with Jesus Christ.

With my prayers and blessings for a good Advent and Christmas for all of you.

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✠ **Anders Arborelius ocd**

Bishop of Catholic Diocese of Stockholm