

## ADVENT MESSAGE 2021 FROM BISHOP NOËL SIMARD

### WITH HIM, LET US HOPE AGAIN

Our world is currently experiencing a social, economic and human crisis marked by rejection and exclusion, a crisis that the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly aggravated. It is the poor and the people living on the peripheries of our societies, such as migrants, undocumented migrants, homeless people, casual workers with no fixed income, who have been most affected by the pandemic. Our church has also been severely impacted since the beginning of the pandemic. The sanitary restrictions and the confinement that have been imposed have put our Christian communities to the test, and they have had to limit their Eucharistic gatherings and their catechetical and social meetings. For us as relational beings, hugs and handshakes have become forbidden fruit. The repercussions of this pandemic crisis for ecclesial life are already becoming apparent.

In the face of this prevailing situation, we may rightly ask, "Can we still hope?" Yes, these are difficult times for the Church and the world. We could easily stall and give up walking and waiting in the face of all these reasons to despair. But there is another reality that we must learn to look at: the coming and building of a better world, the establishment of the Kingdom of God here and now. It is urgent to look together, with clarity, realism and hope, at the state of our world and of our Church, and to identify the gestures of solidarity, of sharing, of listening and of reconciliation that are taking place everywhere in the world. All the efforts that are being made to save our planet from degradation, all the development projects sponsored by Development and Peace and Caritas International, all the health care provided by Doctors Without Borders, all the gestures of support offered by Aid to the Church in Need, are all reasons to hope again. And closer to home, there is the Guignolée, Centraide, the Café des deux pains, Meals on Wheels, La Maisonnée, the bus for the homeless, the collection of clothing and sanitary products, etc. In all this I find reasons to hope again and to strengthen my hope. Moreover, the Advent texts are a source of hope. The seed of justice announced by the prophet Jeremiah, Baruch's invitation to believe in a glorious future realized in the One whose name is "Peace of Justice" and "Glory of God", the prophet Zephaniah's call to rejoice because the Lord is with us, the prophet Micah's announcement of a shepherd whose power will extend to the ends of the earth, all these prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus, by Jesus and with Jesus who is always with us. But he is counting on us to work for the building of this new and authentic world that he has established.

It is up to us to give an account of our hope that is "anchored" in the Word of a God who has walked and continues to walk with us. It is up to us to dream together of a better world after the pandemic. We never come out of a crisis the same way. We can come out better or worse. To seize this opportunity for improvement, we must "reflect, discern and choose". In his video message to the participants and attendees of the IV World Day of People's Movements on October 16, 2021, Pope Francis calls on everyone, especially the powerful of the world, to change the social-economic models that maintain this relentless rationale of profit and the culture of indifference, and to become those "collective Samaritans" who respond to social, racial, or gender injustice and the wounding of dignity. This ties into our pastoral theme of creating happiness by having a giving heart. For our Church, Pope Francis proposes this beautiful project of the Synodal process, that is to say, of this journey made together not only to dream of a new and emerging Church but also to take action by doing Church differently.

Yes, it is still possible to hope and to open, in a realistic way, paths of hope. May the time of Advent, a time of waiting and vigilant watch, root us more in this awakened and active dream of a better world based on sharing, mutual aid, justice and love that gives and gives of itself! And this cannot happen without the presence of Christ. It is with Him that we can proceed with confidence on the road to the Kingdom and make it happen here and now. With Him, it is still possible to hope, and this, in joy.

+ Noël Simard

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