



PASTORAL MESSAGE OF MGR NOËL SIMARD FOR THE YEAR 2019-2020

STEPPING OUT WITH LOVE!

Still in the spirit of Pope Francis, who challenges us to be a missionary Church, a Church "reaching out", this year, our theme concludes the process undertaken over the past three years and which focused on the theological virtues. After the virtues of faith and hope, it is now the virtue of love which, as Saint Paul tells the Corinthians (*1 Corinthians 13:13*), is the greatest of the three.

WITH LOVE....

What is love or charity? This is a very important question that has too often been answered by reducing charity to a single dimension, that of "doing charity", "giving to the poor". To live this virtue better, we must rediscover its richness and depth. Reflecting God's love for all human beings, charity (*caritas* in Latin and *agape* in Greek) reflects God's love for the world and its roots in the human experience. And to live love in God's way, we must draw from God's own charity. God is love and it is through love that He comes to meet us. Its only power is that of love. Through his offering on the cross, Jesus reveals to us how far God's love goes when he tells us his passion for humanity in the passion of his Son. In Jesus, God gives Himself to raise and save humanity. What is proposed and asked of us in the first place is to let ourselves be grasped by Christ, to let ourselves be embraced by his Love, to let ourselves grapple with the violence of his Gospel (*Phil 3:12; Gal 2:20*). To let oneself be loved by God is to accept his Love and obey his Word: "If anyone loves me, he will obey my words. My Father will love him, we will go to his house and we will live with him (*Jn 14:23*). In his apostolic exhortation "*Gaudete et Exsultate*" on the call to holiness in today's world, Pope Francis recalls that the first of the great manifestations or characteristics of love towards God and neighbour is "*to be centered, firmly centered on God who loves and sustains... It is fidelity in love, for he who relies on God can also be faithful to his brothers*" (n. 112). And as Pope Benedict XVI so pertinently reminds us in his encyclical "*Deus Caritas est*" on Christian love: "*If contact with God is completely lacking in my life, I can never see in the other than the other and I fail to recognize in him the divine image. If, on the other hand, in my life I completely neglect attention to the other, desiring only to be "pious" and to fulfil my religious duties, then even my relationship with God is drying up*" (n. 18). It is in Jesus that God's love was revealed in all its greatness and exigency. It is therefore with the eyes of Christ that I can give the other the look of love he needs. In Jesus, God loves us and makes us see his love; from this first and caring love of God, and as an answer, love can blossom and spring forth in us. In Jesus, with Jesus and through Jesus, I love, in God and with God, the person whom I do not appreciate and whom I do not even know.

If we want to remain faithful and serene in our hurried, changing and aggressive world, we must let the fire of the Spirit stir in us this love made of patience, gentleness and constancy in the good. This is what the flame that underlies the heart in our logo is intended to highlight. In our culture, which is marked by great limits and certain risks - Pope Francis speaks of nervous and violent anxiety, negativity and sadness, *acedia* (a spiritual state of melancholy due to indifference, discouragement or disgust) convenient, consumerist and selfish, and individualist - (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 111), we can only resist if we maintain a living contact with God through meditation on his Word, prayer, sacraments, charity and participation in the life of the community. Only the inner strength that is the work of grace can

protect us from indifference and the contagion of violence and selfishness. It is a question of keeping love in truth because love without truth rots the heart and truth without love hardens it.

LOVE IN SPITE OF....

If we want to follow Christ, we must be ready to face opposition, hatred, injustice, evil and death. Through his death and resurrection, Christ overcame evil and sin. However, our faith in this victory of crucified Love spares us neither the enigma of evil nor the anguish of silence nor the test of doubt. On the other hand, it gives us the strength to love in spite of the suffering of the innocent, hatred and death. It enables us to rely on the power of love and to surrender ourselves to it. In the face of the scandal of evil, we must, following God's example, not withdraw but expose ourselves. It is in this logic that forgiveness and love of enemies can be understood and experienced. Evil cannot be overcome by evil, which is renouncing the demands of love. On the other hand, moral good is born of love, manifests itself as love and is turned towards love.

LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

The love of neighbour and the love of God merge into one another: in the little one we meet Jesus himself and in Jesus we meet God. But who to love? The one who needs me and whom I can help, this one is my neighbour. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the neighbour is not the one who is close to me, it is the one I make close to myself. And in Matthew 25:40, Jesus identifies himself with those in need: the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, the people in prison. We could add seasonal migrants, immigrants, refugees who are knocking at our doors and whom we unfortunately leave at our borders or in the open sea. Faced with the enormous challenges facing our world (pollution, poverty, exclusion, etc.), we must be fervent and bold in charting new paths in the practice of charity. To invent nothing leaves the field open to suffering, insignificance and barbarism. Let us listen again to Pope Francis: "*God is always a new thing, which pushes us to leave relentlessly and to move beyond what is known, towards the peripheries and borders. It leads us to where humanity is most wounded and where human beings, under the guise of superficiality and conformity, continue to seek the answer to the question of the meaning of life. God is not afraid... and does not fear the outskirts. That is why, if we dare to go to the outskirts, we will find him there, he will be there*" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 135). Love is our mission and more than ever, we need this virtue of parrhesia (freedom of speech, boldness and confidence) to overcome fear, premeditation and timidity.

For several years now, we have been invited to do Church differently. In response to this call, it is necessary to take risks, to dare and to know how to invent new paths. We cannot allow ourselves to be numb by the comfort of the shoreline. Let us look at Jesus: his compassion "urged him to go out of himself with vigour to announce, to send on mission, to heal and liberate" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 131). His charity has been a gift, a fraternity, a solidarity with the poor and the little ones. Following Him and like Him, let us have our hearts in our hands to feel compassion in the face of human misery and to want to relieve it. It is this heart in our hand - which we find in our logo - that makes us feel the need to be the neighbour of the poor and the little ones, of the ones whose flesh is wounded, whose life is oppressed or whose soul is darkened.

IN COMMUNITY

If love is relationship, openness to others, gift and communion, the Church can only be a community of love. As such, it manifests the love that exists between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, the model of

the human family. This is what the three people in the heart of our logo represent: both Trinitarian love, the human family and the communion of love in the Church. The latter also has a particular task of practicing charity, at all levels and in all dimensions (material, spiritual, moral, social). This task is the responsibility of each of the faithful and of the entire ecclesial community (local, diocesan, universal). Benedict XVI clearly states it: "*The Church is the family of God in the world. In this family, no one should suffer for lack of what is necessary*" (*Deus Caritas est, n.25b*). Hence our responsibility to work towards the establishment of a social order based on justice. The Church cannot remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. If it is up to governments and civil authorities to build a just order of society and the State, by which everyone receives what is due to him, the Church has a duty to offer its specific contribution, just as it is the characteristic of the lay faithful to commit themselves to promoting justice in their living environments. Justice and charity go hand in hand and one cannot be without the other.

Today we are faced with an "alarming" urgency, that of committing ourselves to safeguarding our common home and responding to the threats currently facing the human family and our suffocating and moaning planet. As Pope Francis insists in his encyclical *Laudato Si* on the safeguarding of the common house, we must set up and develop an integral ecology where human dignity is preserved, where the poorest are cared for, who, unfortunately, bear the brunt of environmental disasters. It is in response to his call that our diocesan Church has been seeking for some years to be "a Green Church". We can do more in this regard just as we must increase the place of social pastoral care in our parishes and Christian communities. The Church of Valleyfield has an enviable reputation for strong social commitment and I am delighted with the arrival of a new diocesan leader in social pastoral care who will be able to increase our network of mutual aid and social action.

Finally, we have a special job to do, to warm up love and make it visible. In the missionary conversion that is asked of us, it can happen that the "missions" we give ourselves take on such importance that we forget to live them in love, friendship and respect. If we have to worry about the tangible result of our action, it must not be at the expense of the concern of the people who work in our parishes. The lack of love, trust, warmth and friendship in our apostolate has a devastating effect: love cools and division sets in. François Mauriac wrote pertinently: "*The day when you will no longer burn with love, others will die of cold*".

This year, let us redouble our efforts to counter this logic of the individual for himself, of profit and the selfish satisfaction of our needs and desires; let us adopt and promote the logic of giving, sharing and forgetting oneself, in a word, charity. And in the words of Pope Francis addressed to the priests but which apply so well to all of you, dear diocesan men and women: "*Thank you for the joy with which you have known how to give your lives, revealing a heart that, over the years, has struggled and struggled not to shrink and become bitter but to be, on the contrary, enlarged every day by the love of God and his people*" (*Letter to the priests on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the death of Saint John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, August 4, 2019*).

STEPPING OUT WITH LOVE! Yes, "Let us go out, let us go out to offer the life of Jesus Christ to all... Outside, there is a hungry multitude and Jesus keeps repeating to us: "*Give them something to eat yourselves (Mk 6:37)*" (*Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, n. 49*).