



Archbishop of Montreal

Pastoral Letter :

Rediscovering the depths of our soul

March 17, 2020

Dear People of God of the Archdiocese of Montreal,
Dear Brother Priests,
Dear Pastoral Team Members,

TURMOIL

Day by day the COVID-19 pandemic, declared March 11, continues to spread while preventative measures intensify. There is much uncertainty, but in just a few days, you have already courageously committed yourself to embracing important hygienic, social and pastoral measures to fight the contagion. I thank you most sincerely for the personal and communal efforts you have made.

As outlined in my March 13 letter, we adopted certain measures to contribute to the care of the body, heart and soul, while we continue to monitor the situation. In that letter, I asked that Saturday-evening/Sunday masses be suspended in parish churches, but that parishes keep church doors open and offer a welcoming presence.

OPEN DOORS

Government authorities at various levels have now asked us to introduce more restrictions, such as preventing gatherings entirely because they bring people together, which increases the risk of contagion; something we want to avoid as much as possible.

This is why the measures that I applied to Sunday now apply to the entire week. Along with the bishops of Quebec, I ask that all weekday public masses be cancelled in church, as well as all pastoral or liturgical gatherings, until further notice.

That being said, I also ask that church doors be kept open for as long as possible each day to welcome people, that exposition of the Blessed Sacrament be arranged to facilitate personal prayer, that personal accompaniment and the Sacrament of Reconciliation be available, while respecting the social-distancing requirement of keeping one-metre apart.

It is an uncomfortable measure but, at the same time, it expresses social solidarity in the fight to contain the virus. How can we ensure that this period – which can be likened to Holy Saturday and the Silence of God – becomes a time to seek God in the depths of our heart, soul and spirit? How can we take advantage of this time to learn to listen more to others, learning about their burdens, loneliness and thirst for God? How can we take advantage of this time to draw closer to God? Why not begin to pray every day, at home as in church, and to honour Sunday, the Lord's Day, more fully?

FAMILIES and SOCIETY

The family is the basic unit of society and the Church. Drawing upon faith, hope and love, the stages of life and the gift of grace are highlighted in the celebrations of baptism and confirmation, weddings and funerals.

During this health-care emergency, it is necessary to postpone these celebrations until publichealth concerns have diminished. These are events that bring many people together, which in the current state of affairs increases the risk of spreading the disease. However, should a funeral be held with bodily remains present, rather than cremated, it might not be possible to postpone the liturgy. The funeral must, therefore, be celebrated “in camera” (privately, with restricted attendance), with the possibility of celebrating a memorial mass for the deceased at an appropriate time in the future.

SENIORS

As a society, we are indebted to our senior citizens. Because of underlying health issues, illness or age — especially for those 70-years-old-plus — they are particularly vulnerable during this pandemic. As a precautionary measure, they need to stay at home and refrain from going out, so as to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus. However, it may lead to a sense of loneliness and isolation.

Is it possible to create prayer networks via phone or online, of ten or more of these homebound individuals, who share their intentions and offer their days, burdens and prayers for their family, society, the world and the Church?

I’m asking our many priests, permanent deacons, people of consecrated life, and lay people, who are 70 years of age and above and who give so much of themselves, to stay at home. It is a demanding request because you have hearts of gold, but at the same time, we want you around to share in the life of our parishes and various communities for as long as possible.

WORKS of PRAYER and MERCY

It is possible to emerge stronger from this ordeal confronting us if each one of us focuses on the role of prayer and mercy in our life. Let us show solidarity in doing our part regarding prevention and showing compassion for those most-at-risk.

Let us not forget those who are sick or alone, people in our family, movement, community, parish or mission. Let’s remain in touch with them. Let us assure them that we are very reachable. Let us be available to those approaching the end-of-life and to their families. Let us make sure we are informed and share the timetable of masses available on television. Parishes could use the technology at their disposal to record a mass not open to the public and broadcast it on their website or post it on a YouTube channel.

Let us pray to Mary with confidence using this ancient prayer, which dates from the 3rd century: “Beneath your compassion, we take refuge, O Mother of God, do not despise our petitions in time of trouble: but rescue us from dangers, only pure, only blessed one.”

Let us pray to St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church and of Canada. St. Joseph, protect our families, city, province and country. May Jesus Christ keep you in his Peace!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archevêque de Montréal