



Diocese of Whitehorse
BISHOP'S OFFICE

Pastoral Letter for Easter 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is always present in our lives. Yet due to distractions or difficult moments, our Lord can seem absent or indifferent to us. In the time of Lent, the Church encourages us to rediscover and to re-experience God's victory, salvation, and His Resurrection.

We can often think that fasting, unlike feasting, is a sad time. When we focus on our shortcomings and on our sins, we can perhaps feel disappointed and discouraged. But the true purpose of Lent is to prepare us to experience in a new way Jesus' Passover, and to rediscover the greatness of God in our own weaknesses.

The temptations of Christ in the desert give us a clear example of how the devil takes advantage of our sufferings and sins. In the desert he tells Christ, "If you are the son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves of bread". It is a subtle way of saying that if God is your father, why do you have to suffer at all? If God is love, why do you have to be hungry? If God is merciful, why do our beloved ones die? If God loves and protects His children, why do we have the scandals in the Church? Often, we fall into feeling that God has abandoned us, or that His very existence is nothing more than a wishful dream. It seems, therefore, that we have no choice but to rely on ourselves alone; and if we can't dream of heaven, we then must live as comfortably as possible here on Earth. And yet our pursuit of happiness here and now seems ultimately futile since we know our life will eventually end.

The letter of the Hebrews observes that the devil has power over us precisely because of our fear of death. Here the apostle does not mean only biological death. We are also afraid of all things that remind us of our very fragility. Loneliness, poverty, being ridiculed, not being understood, and many other sufferings truly "kill us", as we commonly say. Since there are so many ways in which our life can go wrong at any time and we are never safe, one can be tempted to just pretend that everything is fine. Thus, we often alienate ourselves; that is, we desperately seek anything that would distract us from pondering what truly troubles us. Today, for example, we are dealing with young adults who seek a release from their lives through drugs and alcohol. Their sufferings, perhaps of not having parents around, or living in poor conditions, or having no hope for the future, can seem unsolvable and unbearable. Another example is the fear of Covid-19 which has left many people perplexed and terrified. Many of us, already vulnerable, were faced with the possibility that any human contact is automatically a death threat. Can we be truly happy in these conditions? As it is pointed out in the book of Genesis, the devil's solution to our fears is simple: take control of your life, do what you need to do to dominate all your threats. If you need to sin, do it, because there is nothing else that can be done. Yet when we sin, we truly experience our separation from God who is love, life, and hope; and the consequences are far worse.

Seeing this reality of sin, we understand the reason why God sent His only begotten Son into the world. Through His death and resurrection, He wanted to take away all the sins of the world and lead us into eternal life. By raising Jesus from the dead, God was reconciling the world to Himself and uniting us as brothers and sisters in Christ. Upon the Cross, Christ forgave all our transgressions, even knowing that this would cost Him His life. St. Paul said that through His wounds, we have all been healed. This is so true because in Christ we have experienced the patience, mercy and forgiveness of God. As we hear, God loved us even when we were His enemies. Now that we truly are His children, how much more will He do for us.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Easter is at hand, and the Good News is that Christ is knocking at the doors of our hearts asking us to let Him enter and dwell within us. Biblical characters both witness and invite us to experience it. In Lazarus we discover ourselves bandaged and dominated by our sins and passions. But at His voice we come out! When we want to quit, Jesus meets us on the road to Emmaus. He breaks the bread and sets our hearts on fire. When we hurt and doubts darken our life, He visits us as He came to Thomas. He shows us the wounds that hurt no more. When we fall, sin and betray Him, the Lord comes to us as He came to Peter. He treats us gently and kindly. He asks us if we love him, and He accepts our trembling response. As Mary we are sent to tell others that He is truly risen. He tells us not to cry, to believe and that He will be with us till the end of the world. Our Lord has willingly offered Himself up, but the Father has not abandoned Him, but brought Him back to life. And “God exalted him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!” Amen

Happy Easter to all. **Christ is Risen. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!**