



Peace be with you!

I hope that by the time this letter is published, spring will be more obvious than it is as I am writing to all of you. Like the sun rises in the morning every day, although it might take more time, God is faithful and I am sure that summer will arrive too... in His time.

It has been a blessing to visit you all throughout the year, but in particular the faithful of the most northern deanery of our diocese as I am presently doing the Pastoral Visit there. I thank the four priests of this region for their hospitality and help in organizing this Visitation. I also am so grateful to all who help them and support them. I really enjoy discovering these new places and the faithful who make up the Church there. I have to say that I particularly love to meet the children in schools and at church. Their simplicity, spontaneity and joy remind me of why Jesus invited us to be like them (see Matthew 18:3).

As I go around, I am deeply touched by all the difficult stories I hear. Addictions, violence, abuse, poverty and difficult relationships really affect our families and church communities in so many ways. Jesus “came so we may have life and have it to the fullest” (John 10:10). So where has this life gone?

Following Jesus is difficult and challenging, but it should bring fulfillment, peace and joy. As I visit around and hear stories, I also realize that many people don't rely on God for everything. If we wait to be in crisis to reach out to God, we will probably be very disappointed because it's not just about receiving from Him. It's all about having a personal relationship that, as a bonus, protects us from the very same things that get us into trouble in the first place. Sin is not just doing something wrong; it's going against the very dignity of our humanity and the holiness of our baptism: it's going against the love and will of God. When we don't have a personal relationship with Him, we try to find other ways to fill the void that his absence creates in our lives. Nothing will ever be able to replace his love for us. Drugs, activities, human relationships might give the impression that they fill us, but we know by experience that it only lasts for a short time, then we need more. Still, we keep looking elsewhere.

I think a lot of people don't understand why we have church on Sunday. We shouldn't go there because of the priest, the requirements of the Church, our parents or any other reason than to be together in the presence of He "who loved us so much that He sent his only Son, so that whoever believes in him, should not die, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). It's not about following the Church's teaching, or being afraid to go to Hell, or being cursed if we don't go. It's about receiving today this abundant life that Jesus is talking about. If that is not what is happening as you are going every Sunday, then we are doing something wrong as a Church. If you are not going, you are missing out.

I have a dream, and I invite you to pray for that dream. I also think that this is not just my dream: it is the dream of all who see people suffer because the will of God is not respected. I believe that this is the dream of God himself: to see all live abundant lives, free from addictions and false 'fillers', spending time alone with Him every day, worshiping Him with others at least once a week and being filled with the love that makes us want to love, and share, and give, and grow together under His protection.

I wish that all could experience what I have been living since the day I said to Him: "You are my only Lord and my God". And I know I am not alone who receives this grace daily.

That can only happen if we become like little children who trust their Father, and believe that, even if it sounds too good to be true, God does not want to make us his slaves, but his friends (see John 15:15).

Blessings to all of you. Have a holy end of Easter Season and a spirit filled summer.

Yours truly in Christ, the Risen Lord,

+Charles

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