



SEEKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD ABOVE AND BEYOND ALL OTHER THINGS

Pastoral Letter to the People of God in Toronto

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May Jesus through Mary reign in your hearts

At the beginning of this **New Year**, I thought it opportune to write to the entire Church of God in Toronto, to you all, members of our beloved archdiocese, in an effort to share a few thoughts as we embark upon yet another year of intense and grace-filled pastoral, spiritual, sacramental, educational, social and administrative activities - all intent, naturally, on building the Kingdom of God. In the pages that follow, **I wish to offer you a theological, spiritual and pastoral meditation on this very important tenet of our Catholic Christian faith, in the hope that my reflections on the Kingdom of God in our midst will accompany and perhaps inspire you throughout the year.** The spiritual and social renewal of our lives and communities requires that we deepen our understanding of and appreciation for the Church's perennial teachings of our faith and let ourselves be challenged and formed by the Words of Christ which are eternal and forever life-giving.¹

It is now over nine months since I began my ministry as archbishop of this extraordinary portion of the People of God and it has been a time of discovery, community outreach, personal encounters and of palpable fraternity. The Mass of Installation of 25 March last, Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, was the beginning of a new phase in my ministerial life as well as in the life of our particular Church - to which I am committed wholeheartedly.

These months have provided for me very numerous occasions to visit and to celebrate, to listen and to learn so as to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”² for our local Church. I continue to make myself available as much as I can to the entire archdiocese, naturally within the limitations of time and commitments.

As disciples of Christ, we experience and live out our Catholic faith, in our Toronto archdiocese, within the framework of a very extensive, diverse and complex ecclesial and societal reality, but one which offers us many opportunities to be mutually enriched and to witness with Gospel boldness to the truth that sets us free,³ namely Christ himself.⁴ I have been extremely busy traveling around the large archdiocesan landscape, committed to meet the array of different communities, listen to their needs and get to know people personally, namely the priests and deacons, parish teams of lay staff and volunteers, administrative personnel at the pastoral centre, men and women religious, seminaries, homes for the elderly and the infirm, academic institutions, health care and social services, cultural and ethnic communities, youth, families and many others. Numerous liturgical celebrations and several informal get togethers have made for enjoyable and inspiring months and have deepened my understanding of the episcopal ministry needed in the GTA at the present moment.

I give thanks and praise to the Lord and to each of you for the warm welcoming I received and the enthusiastic gatherings we shared, be it at the regional Masses, different parish visits and all the other celebratory events at distinct venues and pastoral and fraternal settings. I intend to continue visiting, meeting, speaking with and listening to the People of God - clergy, consecrated and laity - so as to better grasp the intricate and yet graced reality we know and love across this vast archdiocese; prayer, consultation, dialogue and authentic encounters will allow me to appreciate even more the beauty as well as take note of the areas of growth of our archdiocese so as to be a more effective spiritual guide and father and dedicated shepherd, striving to serve with the heart of Jesus, the “shepherd and guardian of our souls.”⁵ Our gaze is always fixed on Christ the Saviour who alone can bring to fruition the spiritual and social transformation so much needed in our archdiocese and indeed the world.

CALLED TO BE TEACHERS OF FAITH

When a priest is ordained to the episcopacy, there are a number of promises he makes which are found in the ritual of episcopal consecration itself. One of the commitments speaks directly to his role as **teacher of the faith**, one of the *tria munera*, the three fundamental ministries of a Bishop: to teach, to govern, to sanctify. The particular commitment states: “Do you resolve to guard the deposit of faith, entire and incorrupt, as handed down by the Apostles and preserved in the Church everywhere and at all times?” This is a strong and engaging pledge to teach with fidelity the Word of God, found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and the doctrines of Holy Mother Church and to do so in season and out of season.⁶ This aspect of the episcopal ministry reiterates the Second Vatican Council’s teaching as well.⁷

Proclaiming the Person of Christ Jesus and “the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings”⁸ is a tireless task which requires constancy and vigour. Many of our contemporaries, most regrettably, have lost a living sense of the faith and have distanced themselves from the Lord and his Church. This is heart-wrenching. It is crucial for us to return to the basic tenets of the faith, back to Jesus himself, to his preaching and teaching of the Kingdom, so that acquiring a fresh, new personal knowledge of him, his mystery, and growing in deep love for him as Lord and Saviour, we may more boldly and proclaim and witness to the truths of his Gospel. Pope Francis reminds us that “To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world.”⁹ **Accordingly, I am offering these spiritual reflections on the Kingdom of Heaven and hopefully provide throughout this new year a number of insights for all the faithful to consider on how we can enter into the dynamics and the mystery of the Kingdom more fully, intentionally and responsibly, with all our heart to further our common mission of evangelization.**



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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

When Our Blessed Lord descended from Heaven into our humanity to redeem, reconcile and renew all of creation, his own life-saving ministry included a preaching centred around the Kingdom of God. What exactly is this Kingdom? The phrase, “Kingdom of God” occurs 122 times in the New Testament literature and an overwhelming majority (99) are found in the Synoptics. It is a key and dominant feature of Jesus’ mission, preaching, witnessing and commissioning.¹⁰

In his inspiring and instructive theological work, *Jesus of Nazareth*,¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI points to that insightful ecclesiastical writer of the early Church, Origen, who taught that “it is Jesus himself who is the ‘autobasileia’, that is the Kingdom in person ... the Kingdom is not a thing, it is not a geographical dominion like worldly kingdoms. It is a person; it is he. On this interpretation, the term ‘Kingdom of God’ is itself a veiled Christology. By the way in which he speaks of the Kingdom of God, Jesus leads men to realize the overwhelming fact that in him God himself is present among them, that he is God’s presence.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* accentuates the same notion when it teaches:

“ In the New Testament, the word *basileia* can be translated by “kingship” (abstract noun), “kingdom” (concrete noun) or “reign” (action noun). The Kingdom of God lies ahead of us. It is brought near in the Word incarnate, it is proclaimed throughout the whole Gospel, and it has come in Christ’s death and Resurrection. The Kingdom of God has been coming since the Last Supper and, in the Eucharist, it is in our midst. The Kingdom will come in glory when Christ hands it over to his Father: ‘It may even be . . . that the Kingdom of God means Christ himself, whom we daily desire to come, and whose coming we wish to be manifested quickly to us. For as he is our resurrection, since in him we rise, so he can also be understood as the Kingdom of God, for in him we shall reign’ (St. Cyprian, *De Dom. orat.* 13 PL 4, 528A).”¹²

In addition, the Kingdom of God enters into our very lives (as Christ himself does), indeed into the core of our existence. Again, Origen wrote beautifully that “those who pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God pray without any doubt for the Kingdom of God that they contain in themselves, and they pray that this Kingdom might bear fruit and attain its fullness. For every holy man it is God who reigns ... So if we want God to reign in us, then sin must not be allowed in any way to reign in our mortal body ... Then let God stroll at leisure in us as in a spiritual paradise and rule in us alone with his Christ.”¹³

We acknowledge that **the Kingdom is already inaugurated in the Person of Christ** and that it is present in the Church and in the life and heart of the believer; however, its ultimate fulfillment will only be in eternity, the *eschaton*. Therefore, there is a dimension of the Kingdom being present here and now, *hic et nunc*, in our lives and in the Church as Body of Christ; and yet, it is partially accomplished – here already and not yet fully realised, *iam et nondum*. As we walk the path of faith and holiness as God’s pilgrim People on earth, we experience the Kingdom in a mixed state whereby both weeds and wheat grow side by side until harvest time comes about.¹⁴

Specifically underscoring the ecclesial dimension of the Kingdom, we are reminded by the Magisterium that “the Church, the community of those who have been brought together by the Risen Christ and who have set out to follow him, is “the sign and the safeguard of the transcendent dimension of the human person,” She is “in Christ a kind of sacrament — a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.” Her mission is that of proclaiming and communicating the salvation wrought in Jesus Christ, which he calls “the Kingdom of God” (Mk 1:15), that is, communion with God and among men. The goal of salvation, the Kingdom of God embraces all people and is fully realized beyond history, in God. The Church has received “the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom.”¹⁵

Let us recall that liturgically the Church celebrates Christ the King of the universe on the last Sunday in Ordinary Time; a feast, which was instituted by Pope Pius XI with his encyclical *Quas Primas* in 1925 to celebrate the Jubilee Year and the 16th centenary of the Council of Nicaea.¹⁶



RELATIONSHIP OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH

Vatican II's dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, wonderfully teaches about the **relationship of the Kingdom and the Church**:

“ The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation. The Lord Jesus set it on its course by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand”. In the word, in the works, and in the presence of Christ, this kingdom was clearly open to the view of men. The Word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear the Word with faith and become part of the little flock of Christ, have received the Kingdom itself. Then, by its own power the seed sprouts and grows until harvest time. The Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth: “If I cast out devils by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”. Before all things, however, the Kingdom is clearly visible in the very Person of Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, who came “to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many:” When Jesus, who had suffered the death of the cross for mankind, had risen, He appeared as the one constituted as Lord, Christ and eternal Priest, and He poured out on His disciples the Spirit promised by the Father. From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King.”¹⁷

THE LORD'S LOVING PRESENCE AND ACTION IN OUR LIVES

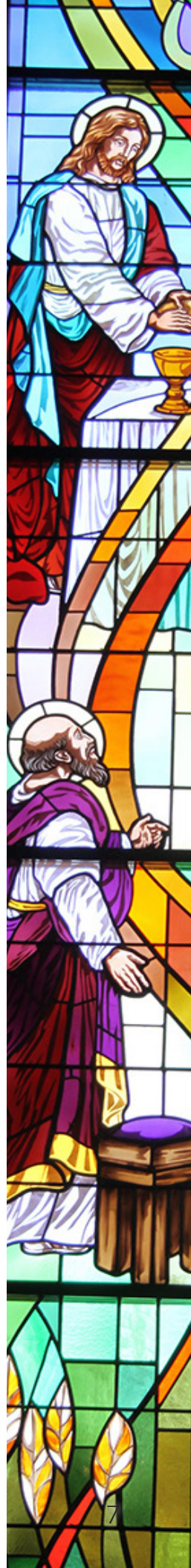
Another way of approaching the mystery of the Kingdom is to consider it as the Lord's loving presence and action in our lives as his beloved children so that benefitting from his healing peace "we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress." It is an enduring and ever-renewing presence of the Lord in history, our personal history, that of the Church and indeed the course of humanity. When Christ speaks of the "Kingdom of Heaven" he speaks of an **event**, of a fact that is operative here and now. God's action to bring about his Kingdom took place most fully in the death and resurrection of Christ. By raising him from the dead, God conquered once and for all sin and death itself and forever inaugurated his Kingdom. The apostles were so convinced of this fact and taken up by power of the Resurrection that they courageously preached the Kingdom of God by announcing Christ's death and resurrection – the kerygma.¹⁸

All the preaching of the Apostles is centred on the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery, with which the Kingdom is identified. In the words of St. Pope John Paul II: "The kingdom cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church. As has already been said, Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled. This happened not only through his words and his deeds: "Above all...the kingdom is made manifest in the very person of Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, who came 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many'

(Mk 10:45)." The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God. "¹⁹

The New Testament infant narratives found in the Scriptures first mention the Kingship of Christ when the Magi from the East seek him, the "king of the Jews."²⁰ Finding him, however, required divine assistance - the star; and following that supernatural light from on high, through the darkness of the night and the perils of the unknown, brought them to encounter the Infant King whom they discovered in the arms of his Mother Mary.²¹ Today too, it is the **light of faith**, received at Baptism, which accompanies us along the arduous journey to find Jesus, as well as **devotion to Our Lady** which facilitates the discovery and encounter with the Lord.

In the Gospel of St. Luke 17:20-25, we see the Pharisees questioning Jesus about when the Kingdom of God would come. They had their own ideas of what the Kingdom was supposed to look like. Their messianic expectations were based on a concept of militaristic takeover which would be inaugurated when the Romans were expelled from Israel and King David's throne re-established. They focused on the commencement of a military and political enterprise. We see a similar situation taking place when the crowds saw Christ accomplishing miracles in their midst and decided to crown him their king "by force." Christ evaded the ungodly and earthly kind of kingship they had in mind and withdrew to a mountain all alone.²² Little did they realize that with the coming of Christ among them, the Kingdom had already been inaugurated since the King himself was present in their midst. And when individuals began to follow Christ as his disciples, there too the Kingdom was at work since, in a real sense, they witnessed - and we witness today - the reality of the Kingdom whenever and wherever the King's will is fulfilled,²³ when we live in right relationship with Christ our true and saving King.²⁴



Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, delivered an inspiring address to Catechists in the Jubilee Year of 2000. He spoke on a number of different aspects concerning the new evangelization and, in that context, touched upon the theme of the Kingdom:

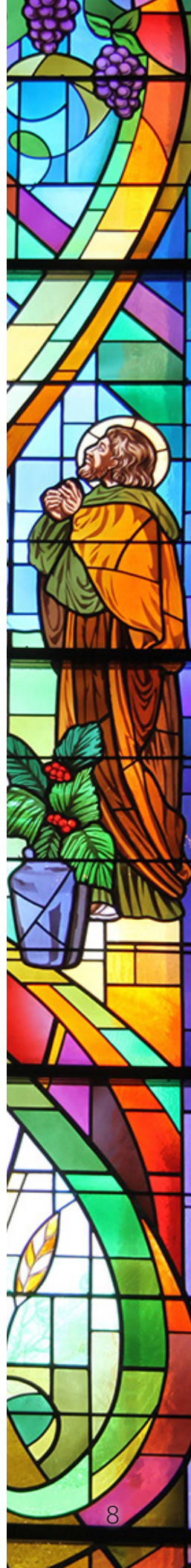
“ The keyword of the proclamation of Jesus is: the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God is not a thing, a social or political structure, a utopia. The Kingdom of God is God. Kingdom of God means: God exists. God is alive. God is present and acts in the world, in our - in my life. God is not a faraway “ultimate cause,” God is not the “great architect” of deism, who created the machine of the world and is no longer part of it—on the contrary: God is the most present and decisive reality in each and every act of my life, in each and every moment of history.”²⁵

Today, every day, in our midst, the Kingdom of God is brought about through the Church since she is its seed and instrument. Holy Mother Church is completely at the service of Jesus’ coming in each human heart as well as in human society as a whole. Christ and the Church can never be separated, it is a spousal bond that unites them; he accomplishes his saving work through her, his Bride which is also his Mystical Body. Vatican II’s dogmatic Constitution on the Church reminds us that:

“ The Son, therefore, came, sent by the Father. It was in Him, before the foundation of the world, that the Father chose us and predestined us to become adopted sons, for in Him it pleased the Father to re-establish all things. To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world. This inauguration and this growth are both symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of a crucified Jesus, and are foretold in the words of the Lord referring to His death on the Cross: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.”²⁶

As we journey through life, at times experiencing the fruits of the Spirit, i.e., charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity²⁷ and at other times sending up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears,²⁸ we are invited to enter more deeply into the reality of the Kingdom so as to contribute to its growth, expansion, strengthening and brilliance. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “the Church looks first to Christ’s return and the final coming of the Reign of God. It also prays for the growth of the Kingdom of God in the ‘today’ of our own lives.”²⁹

In a very real and ‘final’ perspective, that of the *eschaton*, the Kingdom takes on the reality of **eternal life**. In this sense it refers to our end goal, final destination, the reason we were created – to share everlasting life with the Triune God of love and in the company of the saved. In fact, “Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father’s glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.”³⁰ One of the practices of the early Church consisted in praying at the Eucharist the short invocation: MARANA THA. It is a prayer of petition calling out “Come Lord Jesus”; however, it also refers to a statement of belief in the fact that “The Lord has come.” This short prayer thus depicts both the reality of the Kingdom already present *in mystery* (here on earth, in the Church) as well as the otherworldliness of the Kingdom to be inherited one day *in its fullness* in Heaven. It was prayed during Mass which underscores the centrality and importance of the Holy Eucharist for the life of faith, as the Pilgrim Church on our journey towards the eternal Kingdom in Heaven.³¹



EMBRACING LIFE IN THE KINGDOM



While we continue our earthly walk of faith as wayfarers *en route* towards the Kingdom, we are invited to adopt a “Kingdom mindset” which involves working out our salvation with fear and trembling³² while entering into a divine plan of life which allows us to see, consider and evaluate all things from God’s perspective, i.e., focusing on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy.”³³ It also requires that we put on the mind of Christ,³⁴ and assume “Kingdom living” each day, a lifestyle which is typified by the life of Christ himself and exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount.³⁵ The Sermon, we may remember, is the substance of Our Divine Lord’s teachings on the Kingdom as he places before our minds and hearts the spiritual and ethical dispositions, distinctive traits he wishes to see in his disciples. Jesus came to announce and inaugurate in his person and life the Kingdom of God and “his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the full knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.”³⁶ We have all that we need to fulfill all that he asks of us.

We know by Jesus’ words that in order to enter God’s Kingdom, we must be born again, beginning in Baptism,³⁷ which brings us forgiveness of our sins and renewal by the Holy Spirit.³⁸ The awesomeness of this new life given to us is that it enables us to “become partakers of the divine nature.”³⁹ Living as a disciple of Christ in his Kingdom – through the Catholic Church - entering and remaining in it requires a certain self-denial⁴⁰ as well as childlike trust and humility.⁴¹

“Kingdom living” involves dying to ourselves daily and entering into the movement of the Paschal Mystery in all that we experience: death and resurrection, at many levels, in many ways.⁴² To live each day as an active and committed member of God’s Kingdom is

not for the faint of heart, but the Lord is still present and always will be, loving and active, even and especially in many different hardships and struggles. As the crowds welcomed Christ “the king of Israel” with palm branches at his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem,⁴³ so we too acclaim and welcome him with the branches of holy devotion and a living faith as he passes through our daily lives, entering the interior Jerusalem of our hearts and lives. A purified understanding of Christ’s kingship is necessary as we realize the problems that arise when we attribute to the Son of God erroneous connotations. This peril is highlighted even in the Lord’s response to Pontius Pilate.⁴⁴

Embracing life in the Kingdom, adopting the “ways of the Kingdom,” is furthermore described in the **parables** we find in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 13, the well-known stories about the sower and the soils, the wheat and the weeds, the hidden treasure in the field, the pearl of great price, the dragnet, to name a few. For Christ, the reality of the Kingdom was ever so central to the mission he had received from the Father to save us. He exhorted his listeners and would-be disciples to welcome the Kingdom as a gift, with a child’s innocence, with trust and openness, with a humble spirit. He taught that the Kingdom was like a great and joyful wedding banquet but also that it grows like a tiny mustard seed or yeast, quite unnoticeable to those who had not entered into its dynamic force, but still budding in the world, by God’s grace and human cooperation. At this time in the Universal Church, and in this light of seeking first of all and above all the Kingdom of Christ, we also pray for and are attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit as the multi-year XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops takes place on the theme: “For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission.”

“To live each day as an active and committed member of God’s Kingdom is not for the faint of heart, but the Lord is still present, loving and active even in the necessary hardships and struggles.”

While referencing a number of key scriptural passages, St. Pope John Paul II highlighted this fundamental teaching:

“ The Gospel of the kingdom links Christ with the Sacred Scriptures that, using a royal image, celebrate God’s lordship over the cosmos and history. Thus we read in the Psalter: “Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns! Yea, the world is established, it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples” (Ps 96:10). The kingdom is thus God’s effective but mysterious action in the universe and in the tangle of human events. He overcomes the resistance of evil with patience, not with arrogance and outcry. For this reason Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, but destined to become a leafy tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32), or to the seed a man scatters on the ground: “he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how” (Mk 4:27). The kingdom is grace, God’s love for the world, the source of our serenity and trust: “Fear not, little flock”, Jesus says, “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32). Fears, worries and nightmares fade away, because in the person of Christ the kingdom of God is in our midst (cf. Lk 17:21).”⁴⁵

Particularly evocative in light of the Church’s thrust for a new evangelization is the parable of the Sower and the seed. When we read it meditatively and prayerfully, it is a source of deep reflection and renewed hope in our mission to spread the Kingdom. We are commissioned by its teaching to cultivate the seed that is already sown but not expect to reap the harvest – that is left to the Lord. We labour with faith, trust, humility and heart in the vineyard – but leave to Jesus, the Word Incarnate, the end results according to his gracious will and loving plan.

As Pope Francis teaches in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*:

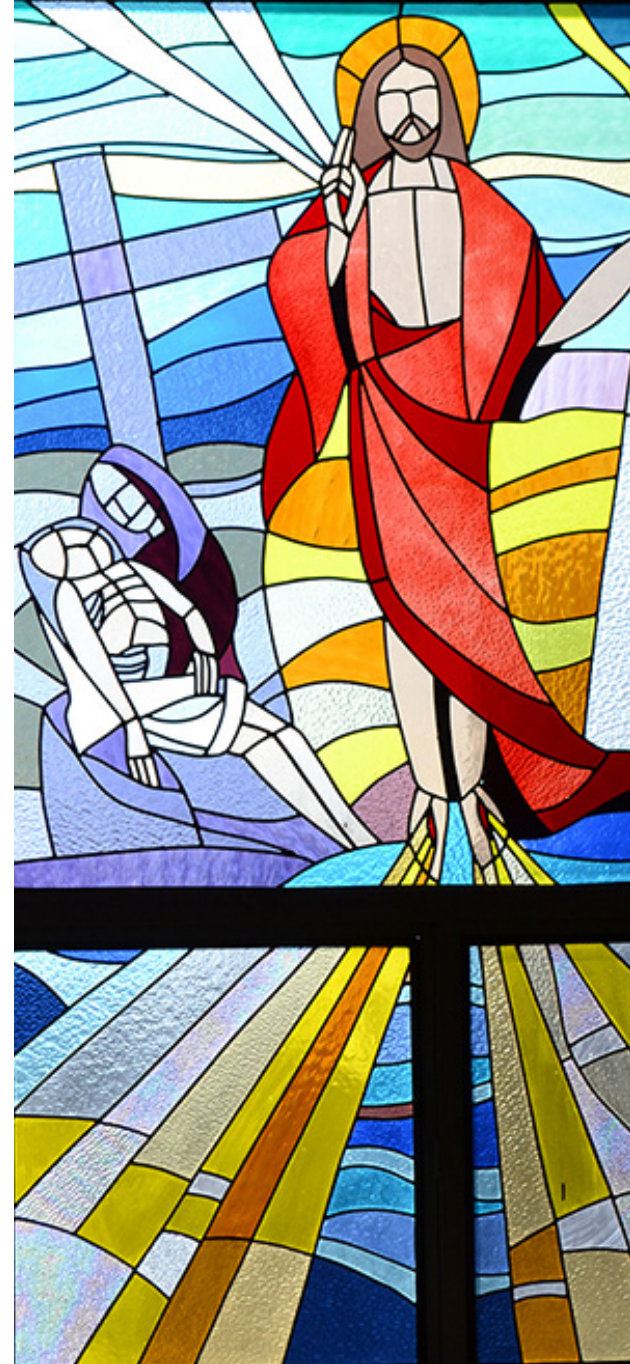
“ Faith also means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity. It means believing that he marches triumphantly in history with those who “are called and chosen and faithful” (Rev 17:14). Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which grows into a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32), like the measure of leaven that makes the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33) and like the good seed that grows amid the weeds (cf. Mt 13, 24-30) and can always pleasantly surprise us. The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ’s resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope!”⁴⁶

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE

Jesus did not stop at merely illustrating, for his disciples, the conditions and mannerisms of the Kingdom; he took it to the next level and challenged them to make a personal commitment, a decision regarding their place in it that would allow for the renewal and transformation of their minds and hearts to take place by his grace. When we enter into the reality of the Kingdom, everything changes in our lives: a new perspective is given, abundant grace is made available, daily life and relationships all take on another meaning, deeper meaning. The Gospel of Mark vividly portrays Jesus who preaches the Kingdom of God breaking into human existence as good news; the fulfillment and nearness of the Kingdom thus underscoring the need for repentance and for faith. In fact, Christ's first words uttered in Galilee are a call to radical conversion, *metanoia*, a profound change of heart and mind: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel."⁴⁷

*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*⁴⁸ are likewise Christ's words addressed to us and to every generation, to the young and the old, the healthy and the infirm, everyone, of all walks of life, at all times, regardless of our particular calling or state. It highlights that as followers of the Master and Lord⁴⁹ we are to seek his Kingdom more than anything else in our life – that is where our heart needs to be. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us to pray that the Kingdom come.⁵⁰ Our life of faith, our spiritual life, in prayer and in action, serving others out of our charisms, living our vocation in the Church involves accepting that God is the sovereign King of our lives, of all of our relationships, of all that we are and possess and there are no others besides him. Christ's Kingdom, though not of this world,⁵¹ exists in this world, in the Church. Belonging to him by virtue of faith and our Baptism, we are constituted as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."⁵²

We are called to be welcoming of his rule over us, his ways need to be our ways, his thoughts our thoughts; it is about loving his will, choosing to fulfill it and submitting our heart, mind, body, memory, emotions, spirit and soul - all that we are to him.



As Pope Pius XI commented beautifully on the ways Christ must reign:

“ If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, ‘as instruments of justice unto God.’”⁵³

The new perspective of the Kingdom requires accepting that, at times, our faith-enlightened life choices will inevitably be at odds with the prevalent culture and clash with it, by consequence. It also points to the mission we have as citizens of the Kingdom to take care of those in need. There is a beautiful reflection to this notion giving by Pope Benedict XVI in highlighting the social outreach we must engage in if we are to be considered and live in the Kingdom of Christ. His words are a commentary on the parable of the Last Judgment (Cf. Matthew 25: 31-46):

“ Who does not know this passage? It is part of our civilization. It has marked the history of the peoples of Christian culture: the hierarchy of values, the institutions, the multiple charitable and social organizations. In fact, the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world, but it brings to fulfilment all the good that, thank God, exists in man and in history. If we put love for our neighbour into practice in accordance with the Gospel message, we make room for God’s dominion and his Kingdom is actualized among us. If, instead, each one thinks only of his or her own interests, the world can only go to ruin. Dear friends, the Kingdom of God is not a matter of honours and appearances but, as St. Paul writes, it is “righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rm 14: 17). The Lord has our good at heart, that is, that every person should have life, and that especially the “least” of his children may have access to the banquet he has prepared for all. Thus, he has no use for the forms of hypocrisy of those who say: “Lord, Lord” and then neglect his commandments (cf. Mt 7: 21). In his eternal Kingdom, God welcomes those who strive day after day to put his Word into practice. For this reason, the Virgin Mary, the humblest of all creatures, is the greatest in his eyes and sits as Queen at the right of Christ the King. Let us once again entrust ourselves to her heavenly intercession with filial trust, to be able to carry out our Christian mission in the world.”⁵⁴

Thinking and speaking in the manner of the “King of kings and Lord of lords”⁵⁵ will enable us to live for him and like him and therefore become truly salt and light⁵⁶ in witness to the world which does not know him.⁵⁷ In his brilliant apostolic letter on the Holy Rosary, St. Pope John Paul II introduces the luminous mysteries and one of them consists in Christ’s proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The saintly pontiff writes:

“ Certainly, the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom... Each of these mysteries is a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus... The preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. Mk 2:3-13; Lk 7:47- 48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. Jn 20:22-23).”⁵⁸

BUILDING THE KINGDOM HERE AND NOW



It is evident that, stemming from our Baptism call to holiness and service, building the Kingdom of God in and through our lives is fundamental in terms of life's meaning, vocation and purpose. In this light, St. Pope John Paul II taught: "But man is not a passive witness to God's entrance into history. Jesus asks us "to seek" actively "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and to make this search our primary concern (Mt 6:33). To those who "supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately" (Lk 19:11), he prescribed an active attitude instead of passive waiting, telling them the parable of the 10 pounds to be used productively (cf. Lk 19:12-27). For his part, the Apostle Paul states that "the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness" (Rom 14:17) above all, and urges the faithful to put their members at the service of righteousness for sanctification (cf. Rom 6:13, 19)."⁵⁹

The human person is thus called to work with his hands, mind and heart for the coming of God's Kingdom into the world. This is especially true of those who are called to the sacred ministry and the apostolate and are, as St. Paul says, "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Col 4:11), but it is also true of every human person.

On a pastoral level, inspired by solid theological and spiritual considerations, it seems to me that when we promote in our personal lives, in the community, through our relationships and in our pastoral and social engagements the characteristics of the Kingdom, imbued with the mind and spirit of Christ, we not only allow for him to reign in our hearts but we effectively also contribute to building-up his Kingdom in our midst.⁶⁰

There is a beautiful, contemporary explanation of the Kingdom which we do well to meditate on frequently:⁶¹

“ The Kingdom of God is a space. It exists in every home where parents and children love each other. It exists in every region and country that cares for its weak and vulnerable. It exists in every parish that reaches out to the needy. The Kingdom of God is a time. It happens whenever someone feeds a hungry person, or shelters a homeless person, or shows care to a neglected person. It happens whenever we overturn an unjust law, or correct an injustice, or avert a war. It happens whenever people join in the struggle to overcome poverty, to erase ignorance, to pass on the Faith. The Kingdom of God is in the past (in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth); it is in the present (in the work of the Church and in the efforts of many others to create a world of goodness and justice); it is in the future (reaching its completion in the age to come). The Kingdom of God is a condition. Its symptoms are love, justice, and peace...”

An insightful and spiritually beneficial consideration that speaks to the centrality of the Kingdom comes to us from the great Ignatian tradition. In fact, St. Ignatius Loyola himself, in the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises*,⁶² proposes a meditation that focuses our attention on the call of the temporal King, that is, of a king of this world who helps us grow in the understanding of the Call of the eternal King, with his methods and his lifestyle that the person must learn and make his own. We are invited to ask for the grace (in each one of the spiritual exercises there is a grace to ask for) not to be deaf to the call but rather ready to do the will of God. Another highlight of the exercise is the meditation of the *Two Standards* - that of Jesus and that of Satan. The person must understand the methods and goals of both and make a choice. We are invited to imagine two armies on a battlefield, each of them holding a flag and ready to charge forward and engage in battle against the enemy. On one side we see Christ and his army and on the other is the devil and his army. The worldly leader first calls us to engage our lives in his service, but then it is Christ who calls to us as our real King. We are drawn into a delightful exercise to reflect those persons in our lives who have witnessed to us what following Christ entails and likewise some other figure in culture and tradition who inspires us in spreading the Kingdom. St. Ignatius asks us to consider the opposing tactics and values of Christ and Satan and we are challenged and called to choose the banner under which we will stand.⁶³

In his first letter to the Church in Corinth, St. Paul challenged the faithful to become builders of the Kingdom: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴ In his epistle to the Romans, the Apostle to the Gentiles likewise clearly stated that “the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁵



*“A kingdom of truth and life,
a kingdom of holiness and grace,
a kingdom of justice, love and peace.”*



AWARENESS OF THE KINGDOM THROUGHOUT OUR ARCHDIOCESE

Over the past several months, throughout my numerous pastoral undertakings, encounters and reflections, I have become acutely aware of how the seeds of the Kingdom are being sown, grow and even bear fruit across our community of faith by the laity, clergy and consecrated. This dynamic engagement and encounter of the Gospel and the culture is a tangible way of fulfilling the following Conciliar teaching which emphasizes the necessity of the reign of Christ in public life as well as private life:

“The whole Church must work vigorously in order that men may become capable of rectifying the distortion of the temporal order and directing it to God through Christ. Pastors must clearly state the principles concerning the purpose of creation and the use of temporal things and must offer the moral and spiritual aids by which the temporal order may be renewed in Christ. The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. [...] Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice of God’s kingdom. The temporal order must be renewed in such a way that, without detriment to its own proper laws, it may be brought into conformity with the higher principles of the Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place, and peoples.”⁶⁶

The million-dollar question now is: How exactly do we engage in this divine-human enterprise which is so central to our discipleship? Where do we focus our thoughts and energy? What is the program? Where do we start? Vatican II’s document, *Lumen Gentium*, gives us a succinct perception into these questions and lays the groundwork for our consideration. It outlines certain aspects of the Kingdom which can become for us an effective starting point: “a kingdom of **truth and life**, a kingdom of **holiness and grace**, a kingdom of **justice, love and peace**.”⁶⁷ There are many noticeable examples in our local Church of these **beautiful Kingdom realities** as well as the **major challenges to the spread of the Kingdom** which we need to address together in a constructive and faith-filled manner:



TRUTH

Truth: I have witnessed numerous devoted parents selflessly striving to bring up their children in the truths of our Catholic faith; dedicated teachers, educators in academic institutions, from grade schools to universities⁶⁸ and seminaries,⁶⁹ including publicly funded Catholic schools, independent Catholic school and the homeschooling community; those centres of higher learning continuing the perennial legacy of so many religious communities from the very beginning our this archdiocese,⁷⁰ and their commitment to imparting solid Catholic education and the life-giving teachings of our Catholic Church as well as the truth of who we are as male and female⁷¹ in the complex universe in which we live. I think of the devoted confessor who patiently and with mercy enlightens the consciences of penitents with the medicine of the Gospel truths. Good, faithful, Catholic journalism and the correct use of social media to convey the truth as well as instances of honest scholarly research and the contributions of the artistic community in its many facets.

Nevertheless, there are lamentable instances also, which we unfortunately experience even daily, that are not filled with the truth of God and which need to be eradicated. As examples, we can mention ruining the reputation of another by telling lies, rash judgment, engaging in detraction, perjury, calumny, deceit, criticism, distortions and other such, indeed destructive attitudes that are not the way of Christ. Jesus described the devil as father of lies.⁷² St. Paul discouraged lying admonishing “stop lying to one another.”⁷³ Let us be builders of his Kingdom by staying away from these vices and by proclaiming the truth of who God is and who we are as his creation destined for holiness and eternal life. Let us avoid all instances of self-deception, of buying into fake news, of compromise with truth-telling, of attempting to rewrite history and of adopting a deconstructionist approach to the truths of God, of humankind and Catholic dogma. We need to circumvent the harmful ideologies we encounter in so many ways and places today as well as acknowledge the need to unmask the emptiness of nihilism, the secularist mindset, the various forms of relativism we read in so many publications and hear in so many conversations. The fideism and rationalism present in the explanation of the faith need to be replaced by solid apologetics and charitable, clear witnessing. We endeavour passionately so that the radiance of the truth may enlighten lives and help us to grow into the saints we are called to be in the Kingdom. We are guided and indeed led by the light of faith and reason as we seek to honour and spread the truth around us.⁷⁴ Finally, let us be docile to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth and make ourselves available to encountering truth and becoming its proponent around us regardless of its origin; to quote the Angelic Doctor: “whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵

Life: The abundant life of Jesus Christ⁷⁶ is made available to all those who come to him with faith and humility. The Lord is the God of life, human and divine life, earthly and eternal life. He continues to give us supernatural life through the seven sacraments of the Church, sacraments which come to us directly from Christ.⁷⁷ I have been edified by the numerous life-giving initiatives and structures in our archdiocese: be it in individuals and parishes promoting the gift of life as well as communities (including the consecrated⁷⁸) endorsing the sanctity of life from the conception to natural death; outstanding staffs at our Catholic hospitals, nursing homes, long-term care facilities and clinics (many which were founded by women religious⁷⁹), social care institutions, families and parish communities where life is born, cherished, respected, nurtured, protected and promoted. The pro-life movement and its volunteers, NFP and its derivatives and proponents, hospices and palliative care units⁸⁰ and their personnel, centres where persons with addictions are welcomed and treated with respect and kindness.

Regrettably we also take note of the plague of abortion, contraception, euthanasia/assisted suicide and other instances where the sacredness of life is undermined and finds itself in great peril. In the face of the dreadful MAiD legislation and the most regrettably deadly and sinful practices currently being proposed by many institutions, we need to be firm in our faith as well as continue to show true compassion and mercy, kindness and closeness to the infirm, the dying and their families. That Jesus' healing touch, mercy and care be experienced through our presence to them. We cannot ignore either the modern forms of slavery which are fueled by an array of addictions and the infamous human trafficking ring. Lastly, and in line with Pope Francis' prophetic leadership, the harmful gender ideologies⁸¹ that have permeated a number of institutions which are not in the least in harmony with the Lord's ways, Christ's Gospel, nor the Church's teachings and which will not bring about any good fruit for the life of the Kingdom. Such erroneous dictates and the policies and lifestyles they promote and celebrate are inconsistent with and contrary to God's laws and the fundamental building blocks of natural moral law. They are not lifegiving in the least even if they are labeled and endorsed

as such by powerful and influential lobby groups. We need to return to valorizing the gift of life, our corporeal and spiritual identity, just as it is given to us by God through our parents, and cherish, defend and enjoy this gift as it is the expression of the Lord's benevolence, his blessedness reserved for us, and part of his universal plan of salvation.

St. Pope John Paul II beautifully reminded us of the **vital importance of living the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount** as a source of growth for the Kingdom:

“Those who have chosen the way of the Gospel Beatitudes and live as “the poor in spirit”, detached from material goods, in order to raise up the lowly of the earth from the dust of their humiliation, will enter the kingdom of God. “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world”, James asks in his Letter, “to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?” (Jas 2:5). Those who lovingly bear the sufferings of life will enter the kingdom: “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22; cf. 2 Thes 1:4-5), where God himself “will wipe away every tear ... and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore” (Rv 21:4). The pure of heart who choose the way of righteousness, that is, conformity to the will of God, will enter the kingdom, as St. Paul warns: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, ... nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10; cf. 15:50; Eph 5:5).”⁸²

HOLINESS AND GRACE

Holiness and Grace: These two joint characteristics point decisively to the “otherworldliness” of the Kingdom, a reality stemming from the Lord’s own initiative and sustained by his love which then enters incarnationally into our world, into its earthly messiness, in order to redeem it. Pope Francis reminded the world that “a Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for ‘this is the will of God, your sanctification.”⁸³

When we look around the landscape of our archdiocese, there are manifold instances where the life of grace and the path of holiness are palpable and this is truly encouraging. The Word of the Lord is being preached and the Gospel of Christ proclaimed. There is the vibrant sacramental life of our parish communities whereby Christ is encountered and sanctifying grace imparted through the ministry of the priests, ordained to act *in persona Christi Capitis* and to nourish God’s holy People. Vocations to the priesthood are a precious gift that encourage us all to desire holiness and to walk with these young men to the fulfillment of God’s call in their life and for ecclesial ministry. Deacons are chosen and ordained to serve in works of charity, justice and at the altar like Christ the Servant. The devout and committed lay ministers who are agents of grace by their witnessing and their service. We see Our Lord being adored in the Blessed Sacrament and other forms of worship whereby we place ourselves in direct contact with our living and loving God and, with a widened heart, receive divine life. Penitence and devotions, fasting and almsgiving, catechesis and blessings – all contributing to the growth of holiness and grace among us, in us, around us. In particular, it is consoling to think of the many celebrations of the holy Eucharist, the “sacrament of love” as the Angelic Doctor phrases it⁸⁴, that are offered up daily - as the holy Mass is the source and summit our Christian life⁸⁵ and I would add as the *centre* as well.⁸⁶ The sacrament of reconciliation is regularly celebrated whereby supernatural, divine life is restored to our soul and our friendship with Christ is strengthened. The undeniable and reassuring presence of Our Lady in our walk of faith and holiness and how she intercedes, through her maternal mediation, the graces Christ won for us by his passion, death and

resurrection. The young and the not-so-young are baptized and the new life of grace is given to them, a veritable new birth. Those confirmed receive the Lord and giver of life, the Holy Spirit, with his mighty power and manifold gifts. Men and women are joined in holy matrimony and receive sacramental grace to witness to the spousal bond of Christ and his Bride, the Church. The terminally ill are forgiven their sins and prepared to meet the Lord as they are anointed. Men and women take their vows in consecrated life and live the life of Christ prophetically, calling forth a greater sense of holiness for the entire Church. In many ways God’s amazing grace is infused in our souls and it both elevates us supernaturally and heals the wounds caused by sin (*gratia elevans simul et sanans*); it allows for holiness to blossom and gives us new opportunities, new beginnings, a daily new lease on our earthy life. As Pope St. John Paul II spoke to young people: “Do not be afraid to be holy! Have the courage and humility to present yourselves to the world determined to be holy, since full, true freedom is born from holiness.”⁸⁷

We are, however, also aware of the obstacles to a life of holiness and grace. In our wounded world we witness the ravages of sin and disobedience to God, unrepentance, vice in its different and destructive forms including the seven deadly sins,⁸⁸ self-centredness, unforgiving hearts, spiritual worldliness, unbridled activism, hypocrisy, careerism, and, of course, the infamous trio: the world, the flesh and the devil.⁸⁹ The patterns of sin (personal, social, systemic) and the destructiveness of vice devoid us of God’s precious life in us. When we let ourselves succumb to our lower passions and choose to distance ourselves from the Lord, we lose our intimacy with him and are left prey to even greater spiritual attacks and evils. Let us often remind ourselves that the virtuous life is the happy life. Our Lord wants to live in us and with us; all needs to tend to the fulfillment of his will and we are asked to surrender to him always. In this vein, let us meditate on St. Paul’s words: “For [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”⁹⁰



JUSTICE

Justice: This gift of the Holy Spirit deals with an attitude of great honesty and loyalty with respect to our relationship with the Lord, in faith, as well as with ourselves and others. Traditionally detailed in three types, distributive, retributive, and restorative, this moral virtue “consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the ‘virtue of religion.’ Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.”⁹¹

We touch here, notably, the ever-important issues of social justice and the necessary care we are called to provide our sisters and brothers in want as well as to our environment and creation as God’s gift. Likewise, we consider the work of advocacy and social change. As I look around the wonderful array of initiatives and projects that are presently underway in our archdiocese, I rejoice in seeing how the poor

and the neglected are taken care of, law enforcement professionals, the courts, and other government and judiciary regulatory bodies are engaged in assuring that persons are respected, protected, provided for with fair and equitable opportunities; we take note of many social engagement organizations, many Catholic too, who valiantly fight for the rights and the dignity of all and with the noble intent of eradicating all forms of racism, poverty, violence, and every other injustice we may encounter.

Each time we roll up our sleeves and get involved in freeing others from oppression, aggression and inequalities; when we help the individual and families move to a place of meaning, hope and purpose, the Kingdom grows considerably. How can we not mention the annual *ShareLife campaigns*⁹² we donate to, and through which we contribute in a very substantial way to *Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto*⁹³ and its members agencies and affiliated organizations; the *St. Vincent de Paul Society*,⁹⁴ *Good Shepherd ministries*⁹⁵ and other many groups who strive to bring solace and justice to, at times, cruel and unjust realities.



We think of all the children who are given education, love, food and shelter including to young women and single mothers in need of protection due to abusive relationships and all forms of domestic abuse; and the elderly who are taken good care of in nursing and long-term care residences; the Indigenous with whom we strive to walk the road to greater healing and reconciliation through the Church's presence and committed accompaniment; those overcoming from many bad life choices are given a sense of responsibility, solidarity and dignity, working for the common good and creating conditions for renewal at the grassroots – there too we grow Christ's reign. Immigrants and refugees are given a new lease on life often fleeing war, destitution and religious persecution;⁹⁶ through the auspices of our office for refugees ORAT⁹⁷ caring in a life-changing way for migrants and displaced persons; peoples and communities across the globe benefit from the generosity of so many of our faithful especially at the occasion of natural disasters, epidemics and calamities.

There are challenges too and I state the obvious when I share how disheartening it is to see the numerous poor and the homeless along the streets of downtown Toronto, those afflicted with mental health disorders and addictions to narcotics, alcohol, gambling, and technology; when we hear of the housing crisis, the dreadful food shortage, and the violent crimes; and on the larger, global scale nuclear armament, the drug and arms trades, dictatorships, military takeovers, the innocent being slaughtered and many more such horrors – we know that we still have a long road ahead of us.

St. Pope John Paul II, at the outset of the Jubilee year, had called us all to engage intentionally in the beautiful work of Kingdom-building:

“All the just of the earth, including those who do not know Christ and his Church, who, under the influence of grace, seek God with a sincere heart (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 16), are thus called to build the kingdom of God by working with the Lord, who is its first and decisive builder. Therefore, we must entrust ourselves to his hands, to his Word, to his guidance, like inexperienced children who find security only in the Father: “Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child”, Jesus said, “shall not enter it” (Lk 18:17). With this thought we must make our own the petition: “Thy kingdom come!”. A petition which has risen to heaven many times in human history like a great breath of hope: “May the peace of your kingdom come to us”, Dante exclaimed in his paraphrase of the Our Father (*Purgatorio*, XI, 7). A petition which turns our gaze to Christ's return and nourishes the desire for the final coming of God's kingdom. This desire however does not distract the Church from her mission in this world, but commits her to it more strongly (cf. CCC, n. 2818), in waiting to be able to cross the threshold of the kingdom, whose seed and beginning is the Church (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 5), when it comes to the world in its fullness. Then, Peter assures us in his Second Letter, “there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 1:11).”⁹⁸

LOVE

Love: pleasing God with a life of faith and a virtuous lifestyle and coming to the aid of neighbour, stepping out with Gospel boldness to make a difference in the lives of others – this we see and rejoice in, day in day out, across our vast archdiocese. In asking us to love one another, a love and a life modeled after his very own love for us,⁹⁹ Jesus was pointing to his own example as one who loves with a love beyond all compare. As a theological virtue, love or charity connects us directly to God, along with faith and hope; these three theological virtues “dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object.”¹⁰⁰

This capacity, imbedded in us like a powerful seed full of potential, was sown in our soul at Baptism. By this power “we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.”¹⁰¹ It spurs us to look at our neighbour with new eyes and a new heart, so that “loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.” And again: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”¹⁰²

The twin aspects of love for God and love of neighbour are indeed exemplified in many ways in our Church. We see this play out in the many cheerful ways we lighten the burden of those we encounter, the kindnesses and patience we bear, the listening and rejoicing with others, the gratitude and the compassion we bring, the self-sacrificing we embody. I have witnessed this great love for God and for others in the ministries that our priests fulfill especially as they give their entire lives for the service of the flock of Christ. In the ways our moms and dads raise their children with selflessness and at the cost of great personal sacrifice. In how we care for those most vulnerable and forgotten of our communities and in our regrettably throwaway culture. Health professionals and social workers going the extra mile to provide for the ill, the distressed and the dying in conditions far from ideal. Silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and fervent intercessory prayers

on behalf of our wounded humanity. Forgiving betrayal, avoiding temptation and sin. Living our vocation with coherence and passion. Devoting time and affection to the Lord by reading and meditating on his Holy Word. Love is attested to in all these and many, many more concrete ways, and so God’s Kingdom is strengthened and blossoms evermore.

All we consider here is based on the Lord who is the source of love, who communicates his love to us in so many ways, and most notably through the power of the sacraments. Love is the catalyst that motivates all other virtues, their amazing driving force. St. Paul reminds us that it is the primary fruit of the Holy Spirit and from which all other fruit follows.¹⁰³ If we establish our life firmly upon love, focus on truly loving the Lord, pleasing him always and in all things, and on loving our sisters and brothers like Jesus and for Jesus, other virtues will develop in our lives and in community, in perfect unity. When we lift people up in prayer and support them in their troubles, when we use fraternal correction and then forgive them seventy times seven, the Kingdom of Christ grows immensely. Truly caring and building up one another, serving like Jesus and bearing each other’s burden, all of this speaks to the love Christ has ignited in our hearts and which translates itself into tangible acts of love for others.

The challenges to love are many and diverse. Those most obvious are the attacks on the dignity of human life and sins which are destructive. We see this in hardened hearts and sinful lifestyles; egoism and lust, the unbridled pursuit of wealth, popularity, fame and status at the cost of relationships and commitments being forgotten or ignored. When we live with lies and vice and in a self-referential way, as if God did not exist, we bruise the Body of Christ and displease the God of life and love. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists five sins against the love of God which directly attack that dynamism which grounds our life: indifference, ingratitude, lukewarmness, acedia and hatred of God.¹⁰⁴ In the end, each day is an opportunity of grace to choose to love like Christ, for Christ and Christ himself – this kind of loves involves loving others in a Gospel, Kingdom, life-giving way. Our lives, if based on this kind of love, produce freedom, peace and joy.¹⁰⁵

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

PEACE

Peace: The final aspect of the Kingdom is one which is universally sought after and which is also a gift of Christ.¹⁰⁶ It is akin to a profound inner coherence of our interior being and one that then comes to flourish outwardly and establishes right relationships to be enjoyed among us. Peace is a harmony of the person that flourishes internally, develops as a structure of relationships and therefore characterizes interpersonal, social relationships. To descend into the depths of the spirit is to reach the source of life and let ourselves be permeated by its harmony which envelops us and allows us to knit an environment of brotherhood together with others.¹⁰⁷

The many efforts we put into building bridges and not walls, in bringing healing and reconciliation, in mending hearts, relationships and reuniting families; when we mediate tough situations and go out of our way to bring about harmony – all contribute to Jesus being King. The *Shalom* which is the gift that the Resurrected Christ gave his disciples is multifaceted: “respect for and development of human life require peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is “the tranquillity of order.” Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.”¹⁰⁸ It is that deep fullness of the heart that comes about inside of us, in relationship with others and between social groups only if and when we follow the laws that the Lord has given to us and we remain in unison with him and with his actions that surround us.

This dimension of the Kingdom is all about fullness of life, plenitude, a hungry heart being satisfied, consolation and joy, fecundity and blessing. In other words, it is akin to an abundant life, fruitful not only on the personal level but in relationship with the community and with the world. In the life of the Church and of Christians, peace descends upon us as a blessing of faith, upon those that have welcomed the Paschal Mystery in their lives. Peace has a strong social dimension, it is a gift and it is also an ethical imperative for us, a path to follow diligently as a foretaste of the consoling presence of the God of peace.¹⁰⁹



In the Toronto archdiocese, I have come to know wonderful people of peace; those men and women who have made it their duty to bring about reconciliation among differing positions; those who look beyond the differences and promote a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, engaging in non-violent initiatives, rolling up their sleeves and getting involved in the social sphere of local governments and who treat all persons with charity, kindness and honour. We celebrate those who have taken unto themselves to fully live out the Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”¹¹⁰ I have witnessed those who earnestly seek a peaceful existence and collaborate with works and initiatives of charity and outreach as well. We also become more aware that working for justice and charity, and ultimately, peace itself, is not an easy task. It demands a fair amount of personal investment, self-denial and carrying the cross. In the end, we prepare the terrain by prayer and hard work, but it is Christ, our lasting peace¹¹¹, who then touches hearts and brings about that *Shalom* that points to the lasting peace of the Kingdom in eternity. Though we are called to collaborate in peace initiatives with governmental and non-governmental structures and agencies, nonetheless, we are reminded by the Psalmist to “put not your trust in princes.”¹¹² Pope Francis provides a critical perspective when he writes that “Peace is possible because the Lord has overcome the world and its constant conflict ‘by making peace through the blood of his cross’ (Col 1:20).”¹¹³ Finally, in contemplating the fruit of peace,¹¹⁴ the Holy Father insightfully proposes a number of principles for peace-building: we do well to meditate on this prayerfully.¹¹⁵

WE ARE NOT ALONE

Within the cloud of witnesses¹¹⁶ who spur us onward to live and spread and spreading the Kingdom today, those who come to mind most specifically are the Church Fathers, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the Mystics and Doctors of the Church, the saintly founders of the Church in Canada and North America. In the more contemporary period (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) we note the powerful Kingdom witnessing of the following saints and blessed: St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Damien de Veuster of Molokai, St. John Neumann, St. John Henry Newman, St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Titus Brandsma, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Bd. Franz Jägerstätter, St. Oscar Romeo, St. Pope John Paul II and St. Pope Paul VI, St. Charles de Foucauld, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, St. John Baptist Scalabrini, St. Katharine Drexel, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, St. André Bessette, St. Maria Goretti, St. Gianna Beretta Molla, St. Padre Pio, St. James Alberione, St. Josemaria Escriva, St. Giuseppe Moscati, Sts. Jacinta and Francisco Marto and Venerable Sister Lucia dos Santo, Bl. Bartolo Longo, Bl. Frédéric Janssoone, Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Bl. Michael McGivney, Bl. Miguel Pro, Bl. Aloysius Stepinac, Bd. Trappist monks of Tibhirine, Bl. Frederic Ozanam, Bl. Nykyta Budka and Bl. Vasil Velychkovsky. Among those non-canonized witnesses that crystalized for the Church and the world a particular dimension of the Kingdom, we can mention Archbishop Fulton Sheen, Chiara Lubich, Frank Duff, Luigi Giussani, Dom Helder Camara, Thomas Merton, Catherine Doherty, and Dorothy Day.

The canonized intercessors are likewise inspirational and powerful witnesses:

“ who have preceded us into the kingdom, especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today. They contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were “put in charge of many things.” Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.”¹¹⁷

Let us take heed the intuitions and suggestions of our Holy Father who penned the following words:

“ Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of “charity à la carte”, or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. We are seeking God’s kingdom: “Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Jesus’ mission is to inaugurate the kingdom of his Father; he commands his disciples to proclaim the good news that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 10:7).”¹¹⁸

In the end, when we actively, intently, generously and wholeheartedly pledge to promote in our personal lives and community these values and virtues, these dimensions of the Kingdom, these inner, spiritual qualities/attitudes, Jesus remains truly the King of our hearts. It is in living the Catholic faith with integrity, passion and coherence that we can then truthfully echo Christ’s words: “Thy kingdom come.” There is still much apostolic work to be accomplished and as the Catechism reminds us: “Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The triumph of Christ’s kingdom will not come about without one last assault by the powers of evil.”¹¹⁹

ABIDING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Allow me to offer a few final suggestions to help the reality of the Kingdom abide in our lives and our families, our communities and institutions, indeed in our entire archdiocesan family. I purposely listed twelve in an effort to propose one for each month of the year:

1. **Acknowledge** personally and communally **Christ's eternal and lasting Kingship** and invite him to reign in our hearts, families and communities as King and Sovereign Lord.
2. Adopt an **attitude of profound docility to the Holy Spirit** to exercise **daily conversion** of heart so as to know and fulfill the will of God.
3. Place the **Eucharistic Christ at the centre** of our life of faith, of our Sunday worship, our entire Christian life and the daily living out of our particular vocation.
4. Embody in our daily living the **three-fold "style of God"** according to Pope Francis: *closeness, compassion and tenderness.*¹²⁰
5. **Love those Jesus loved** particularly and actively care for them, especially the vulnerable, the poor and the abandoned, the ill and the elderly, the young and the ostracized.
6. Engage in the spiritual and temporal works of mercy, charity, justice and peace by **active participation in the public square** (education, politics, science, the arts, economics/finance, communications, social aid).
7. Daily seek out opportunities to **spread and strengthen the Kingdom of God** by working intentionally for *truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace*.

8. **Get more involved in the local community's renewal and blessing** by sowing seeds of goodness, truth and beauty and sharing our gifts, talents and charisms.
9. Be socially conscious and engaged with regards to our **environment, the climate crisis and caring for our common home**.
10. Let **daily prayer** in its many forms (personal and communal, liturgical and devotional, vocal and mental) as well as the daily reading and meditation on the **Word of God** (*lectio divina*) nourish, heal and empower us.
11. Daily **examine one's conscience**, using also the Ignatian *examen*, and frequently celebrate the **Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation**.
12. **Welcome** into our lives and communities, through a profound devotion to and spirituality of **Our Lady** as our Mother and Queen since she has been entrusted to us as a loving maternal presence and we entrusted to her as devoted children¹²¹.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us:

“Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society... When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise ... according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom. God will then be “all in all” in eternal life.”¹²²

CONCLUSION

This meditation on the Kingdom of Heaven, I pray, will hopefully provide you with some spiritual nourishment as we enter into a new year of grace. As you may recall, very recently we have entered into an archdiocesan consultation phase which will help us determine what priorities we believe the Lord is calling us to emphasize in our ongoing evangelization mission within our archdiocesan family for the next decade or so; that is, in what ways can we continue to contribute to the strengthening, expanding and developing of Christ's Kingdom in our local Church. Pope Francis reminds us of "the Kingdom in its challenge" in the following quotation:¹²³

“ Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of “charity à la carte”, or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. We are seeking God's kingdom: “Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Jesus' mission is to inaugurate the kingdom of his Father; he commands his disciples to proclaim the good news that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 10:7). The kingdom, already present and growing in our midst, engages us at every level of our being and reminds us of the principle of discernment which Pope Paul VI applied to true development: it must be directed to “all men and the whole man”. We know that “evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social”. This is the principle of universality intrinsic to the Gospel, for the Father desires the salvation of every man and woman, and his saving plan consists in “gathering up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10). Our mandate is to “go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15), for “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom 8:19). Here, “the creation” refers to every aspect of human life; consequently, “the mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ has a universal destination. Its mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it”. True Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, always generates history.”

In his *Expositio super Isaiam*, as he comments on Isaiah 2:5, “House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord”, St. Thomas Aquinas offered this insightful thought: *Ambulemus, simul et concorditer, ut sit unum ovile – let us walk together and in harmony, so that there be one sole flock*. While referring to Jn 10:16 and Jn 12:35, the saintly scholar interprets the invitation to Israel to walk in the light of the Lord as an exhortation addressed to all of us disciples of the Lord Jesus, to journey together, in harmony, in the divine light and to see ourselves as one sole flock under the guidance of the one sole Shepherd. We walk in unison, with one heart and one mind, along the path which Christ himself has traced for us, as he too walks alongside each man and woman so that we may live in profound communion with the Lord and with one another. The Catechism in fact recaps for us the need for daily conversion and purification of our heart in order to possess the Kingdom: “The kingdom of God [is] righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ The end-time in which we live is the age of the outpouring of the Spirit. Ever since Pentecost, a decisive battle has been joined between ‘the flesh’

and the Spirit.” As St. Cyril of Jerusalem taught, “Only a pure soul can boldly say: ‘Thy kingdom come.’ One who has heard Paul say, ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies,’ and has purified himself in action, thought, and word will say to God: ‘Thy kingdom come!’”¹²⁴

My dear sons and daughters in the Lord, know of my closeness to each of you, your families and loved ones, your communities and your ministries as we begin a new calendar year. Allow me to thank each and everyone of you. I am grateful for your generous engagement in and committed to the different spheres of Church life and community outreach. I appreciate how you strive to live out your God-given callings with integrity. I celebrate with gratitude the loving witness you bear to Christ. I give thanks for the complementarity of vocations, charisms and ministries which you generously share with the rest of the Body of Christ. Let us never allow ourselves to be distracted from the Kingdom amid the, at times, attractive but destructive contemporary trends, ideologies and expressions of the spirit of the world; rather, we ardently seek the only Kingdom worth living and dying for, the only reign that gives life and meaning, hope and grace – that of Christ Jesus.¹²⁵ In doing so, we too may humbly call upon the Lord’s mercy asking him to remember us when he comes into his Kingdom; and at the end of our earthly pilgrimage we too hope to hear the words our Redeemer spoke to the Good Thief: “Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise.”¹²⁶

Let us pray: Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of all hearts, your singlemindedness in living for Christ and spreading his Kingdom is for us a source of great inspiration and unwavering hope. In striving to walk the path of faith as children of our Heavenly Father and disciples and witness of Your Son Jesus and his Gospel, we come to you and invoke your powerful intercession for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us and our families and communities, that we may daily embody the teachings and values of the Kingdom and so come to experience already in this life, the consolations and comforts reserved for the Lord’s good and faithful servants. Amen.

Yours sincerely in Jesus with Mary,



+Francis Leo
Archbishop of Toronto

“Let us never allow ourselves to be distracted from the Kingdom.”



ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. John 6:68-69
- 2 Romans 12:2
- 3 John 8:32
- 4 John 14:6
- 5 1 Peter 2:25
- 6 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.”
- 7 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 25: “Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ, and they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice, and by the light of the Holy Spirit illustrate that faith. They bring forth from the treasury of Revelation new things and old, making it bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors that threaten their flock. Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent.”
- 8 Philippians 3:10
- 9 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 176
- 10 For a more comprehensive but succinct magisterial teaching of Christ as Lord and King, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 440, 446-451, 668-672, 783, 786, 908, 2105, 2628
- 11 Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, part 1, p. 49
- 12 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2816
- 13 Origen, *Treatise on Prayer*, 15
- 14 Cf. Matthew 13:24-30
- 15 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church*, 49
- 16 The world climate at the time of the institution of the solemnity was also one marked by the perilous, murderous and sinful ideologies and political machinations of the rampant atheistic and totalitarian regimes of Communism, Nazism and Fascism.
- 17 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 5
- 18 The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives a succinct explanation of the Kingdom in #541-556.
- 19 St. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 18
- 20 Cf. Matthew 2:2
- 21 Cf. Matthew 2:11
- 22 Cf. John 6: 14-15
- 23 The Lord’s Prayer: “*Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*”, Matthew 6:10
- 24 The *Collect of the Mass of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe*, from The Roman Missal prays: “Almighty ever-living God, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of the universe, grant, we pray, that the whole creation, set free from slavery, may render your majesty service and ceaselessly proclaim your praise. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.”
- 25 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The New Evangelization, Building the Civilization of Love, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists*, December 12, 2000
- 26 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 3
- 27 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1832 and Galatians 5:22-23
- 28 Hymn *Salve Regina*
- 29 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2859
- 30 The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 666
- 31 In explicating Article 12 of the Creed “I believe everlasting life,” the *Catechism* relates a clear teaching on this aspect of the Kingdom’s eternity in # 1020 – 1065
- 32 Philippians 2:12
- 33 Philippians 4:8
- 34 Philippians 2:5
- 35 Cf. Matthew 5-7

36 2 Peter 1:3

37 John 3:3-5, Acts 2:38

38 Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 3:21

39 2 Peter 1:4

40 Cf. Matthew 16:24-25

41 Cf. Matthew 18:1-4

42 In Luke 23: 35-43 we read of the inscription over Christ's head on the Cross which we depict on our crucifixes with the four letters INRI. When we look at the Cross of Christ we are always reminded of his Kingdom of redemption, reconciliation, expiation and healing.

43 Cf. John 12:12-13

44 Cf. John 18:37

45 St. Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, 6 December 2000, 2

46 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 278

47 Mark 1:15

48 Matthew 6:33

49 John 13:13

50 Cf. Matthew 6:10

51 John 18:36

52 1 Peter 2:9

53 Pope Pius XI, encyclical *Quas Primas*, 33

54 Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, 23 November 2008

55 Revelation 19:16

56 Matthew 5:13-14

57 John 14:17

58 St. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 21

59 St. Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, 6 December 2000, 3

60 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 6 is likewise rich in its depiction of the Kingdom's traits through the use of metaphors drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures and

applied to the life of the Church. I good meditation for discovering aspects of the Kingdom growing in our midst: "In the Old Testament the revelation of the kingdom is often made under the forms of symbols. In similar fashion the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in various images. Taken either from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage, these images have their preparation in the books of the prophets."

61 Gerald Darring, St. Louis University, Center for Liturgy, liturgy@slu.edu

62 The Spiritual *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola were written approximately 1522-1524.

63 For a summary of "some challenges of today's world" *Evangelii Gaudium*, 52-75.

64 1 Corinthians 3:10-11

65 Romans 14:17

66 Vatican II, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 7

67 See Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 36. These dimensions of the Kingdom are likewise taken up in the *Preface for the Mass of the Solemnity of Christ the King* in the Roman Missal.

68 The Catholic tertiary institutions offering, *inter alia*, theological formation in Toronto being St. Augustine's Seminary, the University of St. Michael's College, Regis College and the Toronto Oratory/St. Philip Neri seminary.

69 The archdiocesan seminaries are St. Augustine's Seminary and Redemptoris Mater Missionary Seminary.

70 Most Rev. Michael Power, first Bishop of Toronto, welcomed the Loretto Sisters and the Jesuits, and Bishop de Charbonnel did the same with the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Christian Brothers and the Basilians for the work of evangelization in the vineyard of the Lord in Toronto taking the form of education as well as health and social services.

71 See the Congregation for Catholic Education *Instruction* "Male and Female He Created Them - Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education," 2019.

72 John 8:44

73 Colossians 3:9

74 Cf. St. Pope John Paul II, encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 1998, introductory words: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth - in a word, to know himself - so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 14:8; 1 Jn 3:2).”

75 *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1 “omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est.”

76 John 10:10

77 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1114

78 The Sisters of Life have a presence in our archdiocese and through their life-giving ministry in Toronto wonderfully witness to the Kingdom by “serving vulnerable pregnant women to hosting weekend retreats to walking with women in healing after abortion to outreach to university students, we are privileged to journey with women and men across the country towards new life in Christ.” <https://sistersoflife.org/>

79 The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto founded St. Michael’s Hospital, St. Joseph’s and Providence, now joined together under *Unity Health Toronto*.

80 Particularly noteworthy are the *Lake House Palliative Care Centre* which was recently inaugurated at St. Joseph’s Health Centre as well as *Journey Home Hospice* - an alliance involving Saint Elizabeth Foundation as the operator, Inner City Health Associates and Hospice Toronto, hosted by Homes First Society and private donors.

81 In an interview on 10 March 2023 with journalist Elisabetta Piqué for the Argentine daily newspaper *La Nación*, Pope Francis said: “*Gender ideology, today, is one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations. Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs differences and the value of men and women. All humanity is the tension of differences. It is to grow through the tension of differences. The question of gender is diluting the differences and making the world the same, all dull, all alike, and that is contrary to the human vocation.*”

82 St. Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, 6 December 2000, 4

83 Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 19; 1 Thessalonians 4:3

84 Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 73, a. 3

85 Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 11

86 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324: “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”

87 St. Pope John Paul II, *Message to Youth*, 7 August 1999

88 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1865-1876

89 In the *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 41, a. 4, St. Thomas mentions these three spiritual enemies when he discusses Christ’s temptations in the desert: “For at first [Satan] tempted Him to that which men desire, however spiritual they may be - namely, the support of the corporeal nature by food [the flesh]. Secondly, he advanced to that matter in which spiritual men are sometimes found wanting, inasmuch as they do certain things for show, which pertains to vainglory [the world]. Thirdly, he led the temptation on to that in which no spiritual men, but only carnal men, have a part—namely, to desire worldly riches and fame, to the extent of holding God in contempt [the devil].”

90 1 Corinthians 15:25-28

91 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1807

92 <https://sharelife.org/>

93 <https://ccat.ca/>

94 <https://svdptoronto.org/>

95 <https://goodshepherd.ca/>

96 *Aid to the Church in Need* <https://acn-canada.org/> and *CNEWA* <https://cnewa.org/> are likewise strong and impactful organizations who work tirelessly.

97 <https://www.archtoronto.org/refugee/>

98 St. Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, 6 December 2000, 5

99 John 13:34

100 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1812

101 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1822

102 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1823

103 Cf. Galatians 5:22-23

104 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2094: “One can sin against God’s love in various ways:

- indifference neglects or refuses to reflect on divine charity; it fails to consider its prevenient goodness and denies its power.

- ingratitude fails or refuses to acknowledge divine charity and to return him love for love.

- lukewarmness is hesitation or negligence in responding to divine love; it can imply refusal to give oneself over to the prompting of charity.

- acedia or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness.

- hatred of God comes from pride. It is contrary to love of God, whose goodness it denies, and whom it presumes to curse as the one who forbids sins and inflicts punishments.”

105 The Church’s Magisterium teaches that: “Jesus Christ reveals to us that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8) and he teaches us that “the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the love of God that the way of love is open to all people and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood will not be in vain”. This law is called to become the ultimate measure and rule of every dynamic related to human relations. In short, it is the very mystery of God, Trinitarian Love, that is the basis of the meaning and value of the person, of social relations, of human activity in the world, insofar as humanity has received the revelation of this and a share in it through Christ in his Spirit” - Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church*, 54.

106 Cf. John 14:27; 20: 19-21

107 For a beautiful reflection on this theme, read the always profound reflections of Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., who dedicated the 2014 Advent meditations to the Roman Curia to the theme of “Peace as Gift of God in Christ Jesus.” In his reflections he draws upon three distinct and different dimensions of peace, namely (i) peace as **gift** of God in Christ Jesus; (ii) peace as a **task** for which we are to labour, and (iii) peace as **fruit** of the Spirit, namely, of the soul’s inner peace: <https://www.cantalamessa.org/?p=2723&lang=en>

108 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2304

109 Cf. 2 Corinthians 13:11

110 Matthew 5:9

111 Ephesians 2:14

112 Psalm 146:3

113 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 229

114 Cf. Galatians 5:22

115 Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 217-237

116 Cf. Hebrews 12:1

117 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2683

118 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 80

119 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 680

120 Cf. Pope Francis, *Angelus message*, 14 February 2021

121 Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, 23 July 1997: “The title of Queen does not of course replace that of Mother: her queenship remains a corollary of her particular maternal mission and simply expresses the power conferred on her to carry out that mission. Citing Pius IX’s Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, the Supreme Pontiff highlights this maternal dimension of the Blessed Virgin’s queenship: “Having a motherly affection for us and being concerned for our salvation, she extends her care to the whole human race. Appointed by the Lord as Queen of heaven and earth, raised above all the choirs of angels and the whole celestial hierarchy of saints, sitting at the right hand of her only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, she obtains with great certainty what she asks with her motherly prayers; she obtains what she seeks and it cannot be denied her” (cf. AAS 46 [1954] 636-637), 3.

122 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1049-1050

123 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 180-181

124 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2819

125 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 51: “We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the kingdom from what runs counter to God’s plan. This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also – and this is decisive – choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil.”

126 Luke 23:43