

Lenten Pastoral Letter in 2015

Theme: “From family reconciliation to living out the Christian love”

by Cardinal John Tong, Bishop of Hong Kong

Dear brothers and sisters in Lord,

Last Christmas, we celebrated the joy and hope brought by the birth of our Savior. Christ was revealed to be “the real light that gives light to everyone; He came into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through Him, and the world did not recognize Him”. (John 1:9-10) In the beginning, God created light (Genesis 1:3), and light symbolizes life. This light is not the one in physics, but the source and inception of life. Then, God created the provisions that allow life to sustain, including space, air, waters, dry land, vegetation, the light that regulates seasons and climate, and creatures in the seas and dry land. Lastly, the human beings were created as the image of God, the climax and ultimate goal of His creation.

God created man and woman, inviting them to “be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28) Thus in time the institution of marriage and family developed. God’s revelation is to let us understand that a family built upon marriage is a true and sacred life. It is because a family based on a stable marriage is a place where family members can rest and support each other. It is an ideal place for new lives to begin and grow as well as a home for the elderly, the weak and the sick to get nurtured and cared for. In fact, a healthy family will allow the three generations of the elderly, adults and children to be interdependent of each other and offer mutual support. Indeed, it offers favorable conditions for a society to prosper and develop.

Today, some people may indulge in self-centeredness and hedonism, when they may easily forget the presence of God and their servant role that requires them to govern the created world according to God’s will and to continue life with marriage and family. The temptations faced by our First Parents Adam and Eve are still affecting us, driving people, even Catholics, to be too proud and to act according to their own desires, such as drug abuse, addictions, disrespect for life, family violence and lack of care for the elderly and the children.

This year, the first day of Lent coincides with the Lunar New Year Eve, an important day for Chinese family gatherings. The traditional Chinese emphasis is on family values, echoed by the teaching of the Gospel. This family togetherness should be further promoted. Unfortunately, in Hong Kong, some family problems may get worse

and force us to think hard on what and where went wrong, and how to remedy the situation. We must take actions by starting from each of our own families to improve relationships among members and to nurture the familial values.

On the First Sunday of Lent, Christ invites us again to respond to His call: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Gospel.” (Mark 1:15) We must grasp the opportunity to renew our proclamation before God: “You are our God, we are your children. We will live according to the teaching of the Word.” Let us join hands to put into practice the love based on marriage and family, to spend more time with the family, and to maintain harmony among family members, and to nurture children with loving care. We need to do more abstinence and self-sacrifices and to express love in our relationship with others. Then, we live out forgiveness and love in our daily life and workplace to resolve differences and conflicts, now emerging in our society of Hong Kong. Let us appreciate each other’s effort in promoting the progress in society, and to nurture a virtue of care and respect in all matters.

May God grant you peace and joy!

+ John Cardinal Tong
Bishop of Hong Kong
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