



Archevêque de Montréal

Pastoral Letter

PRIMACY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Dear Sisters,
Dear Brothers,

As Archbishop, please join me – everyone within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal – in commending all elected officials and their advisors currently serving in various levels of government. We thank them for what they are doing, what they have done and what they continue to do regarding the current pandemic afflicting us and all of humanity in order to save lives threatened by COVID-19: be it through their co-ordinated response, the implementation and monitoring of preventive measures or the promotion of social solidarity and cohesion. Decision-makers initially focused on the issues related to public health and the introduction of measures to address the emerging economic challenges. The circle of concern has progressively expanded to include mental health and societal issues as we seek ways to begin a new phase of safe “deconfinement” while minimizing, as much as possible, further collateral damage from this ongoing battle.

We know that the search for meaning and spiritual wellbeing is also an essential aspect of our human condition, for we are more than just physical matter. Since the dawn of time, every human being has been confronted with fundamental questions regarding the meaning of life, especially when facing precarious situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic, when existential questions naturally come to the fore. Let us simply say that, in universally-accepted terms, spirituality is what makes us alive, what impels each of us to be the most we can be, what reaches deep within us and, at the same time, goes beyond us, and what gives a unique dimension to our personal history and our relationships with others.

Currently, the spiritual dimension and associated needs of individuals have received little attention, and during discussions related to essential services, there appears to be little time to discuss this issue.

Nevertheless, having come face-to-face as a society with our limitations in combating the isolation of the sick and the elderly, our inadequacies in overcoming all the organizational challenges in meeting some basic needs, our shortcomings in ensuring the survival of many businesses, only highlights the need to discover deep within ourselves the fortitude to live, to love and to serve. Without this, the solidarity to which the whole of society has generously committed itself risks being undermined by fear and blame.

The role of chaplains and spiritual-care workers, where they are present in healthcare institutions, offers such support whenever possible, not only to the sick but also to the staff working tirelessly to provide the required care. Like you, my heart goes out to all the elderly, the sick and the dying, who, whether they are believers or not, have no other recourse than to undertake their interior journey in relentless isolation. Spiritual accompaniment focuses on the freedom of the individual. Those who are receptive to what it has to offer can see in it a path of hope. Those who are not disposed as such may still discover in it a supportive and comforting presence.

These days, we are very aware of the questions and apprehensions that preoccupy individuals, families and the whole of society. There remains much uncertainty and concern regarding health, family, death, the economy, education, culture, society, and local and global solidarity. You are full-fledged citizens and your faith equips you with a vision that embraces every dimension of an individual. Various religions, each in its own way, have always focused on responding to our search for the meaning of life, through joy as well as through sorrow, and on guiding us along the spiritual journey that provides the breath of life to sustain us throughout every weakness. As in every sphere of human life and activity, there are times when we tend to serve ourselves rather than serve others, and members of the Church have not always rendered needed service. But in all honesty, it is indispensable that we draw on the spirit of service, which lies at the core of each human being.

That is why, during this time of confinement, we have not ceased to offer prayer and pertinent reflections through our outreach via radio (Ville-Marie), television (Salt +Light), online platforms, i.e. websites and social media, and telephone communication. We have appealed for social solidarity and the practice of prevention. We have prayed, connected with one another observing physical distance, comforted, encouraged, and persevered to reach out to individuals, families, the lonely and those most in need. I commend and thank all the faithful, volunteers, parish and diocesan personnel, women and men religious, those committed to consecrated life, deacons, priests, and bishops, who, in offering their frailty, illnesses, lives, search for meaning, deeds and prayer to God, trust that He will touch hearts and transform our weakness so that his Light and Goodness might burst brightly through it.

Now that “deconfinement” is being prudently implemented, we hope that there is the same consideration for church-related “deconfinement,” following a well-planned, controlled, phased-in process that allows us to begin gradually expanding our response to spiritual needs while adopting safe practices.

As we are now between Mother's Day and Father's Day, and as we begin to appreciate the downtime we have experienced together for the past two months, I support those efforts to establish Sunday as a common day of rest. Our longstanding tradition is one of observing Sunday as a day of rest. Reasons may vary – religious, psychological, philosophical or social – but as a society, might it not be possible to recognize the need for a common day of rest? For some, it will be a day devoted to God; for others, a day for the family; and for others, a day for the environment – a common day dedicated to rest because we all need to pause and breathe: individuals, families, society and the planet, our common home, as Pope Francis reminds us. Even the economy needs a chance to catch its breath, given that its primary resource is people. We need to take time to breathe together in order to remain together: the family together, which is the building block of society; society together in all its complexity; and the Church together, to bear witness to Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, together, let us recognize the many initiatives undertaken for the benefit of society, the participation of different Christian denominations, different religions and different humanistic approaches. A democracy requires the participation of all. Let us do our part to stand together and to overcome COVID-19. Let us resolve to put the spiritual dimension of our personal, family and faith life first. Let us help create a society that moves ever closer to nurturing all aspects of our quality of life by establishing a common day of rest, which for Christians is the “Day of the Lord.”

I invoke upon you and upon all the land the blessing of God who is rich in Mercy:

God, in your infinite Love radiate your Goodness and Truth onto humanity and our society!

Free us from the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic!

Guide us so that we may become a world ever more concerned for those who are most vulnerable!

May we give of ourselves to serve the common good, the family and life, justice and peace!

Make us children of Light!

Eternal Father, we ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

℞ Amen.

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