

Pastoral Letter on Living the Lenten Experience of “Metanoia”

*“Rend your hearts, not your garments,
And return to the Lord, your God...” Joel 2: 13*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I thank our Heavenly Father for giving me, in his goodness and mercy, the grace of being able to share with you the blessings and deep joy of Lent that come from the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The Lenten Spring

This year’s “Ash Wednesday”, the first day of Lent, falls on February 14, which happens to be two days before the start of the Chinese New Year or “Spring Festival”. It also happens that “Lent” originally means “Spring”.

Spring is a season of rebirth and transformative change. “Come, let us return to the Lord...He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth” (Hosea 6: 3).

Lent reminds us, especially for those who are preparing to receive, on Easter vigil, the sacrament of rebirth. The Lord calls each and every one of us by name. “I have called you by name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1).

2. “Repent, and believe in the Gospel”!

After his baptism at the Jordan, Our Lord prepared for his public ministry by spending 40 days in fasting and prayer in the desert and was “tempted by Satan” (Mark 1: 9-13). He then went forth into Galilee and proclaimed: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mark: 1:15).

These words reflect the ever-urgent and continuing call to conversion of heart and renewal of faith in the gospel. To capture fully the meaning of “metanoia” in the Greek New Testament, “repent” must be understood as a call to a radical conversion of a person’s whole being – of heart, mind and soul – to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and fidelity to the gospel. “Return to me with your whole heart “(Joel 2: 12).

To return to the Lord with one’s whole heart is to surrender oneself to him completely, with unwavering trust in the Divine Mercy.

3. “Rend your hearts, not your garments” (Joel 2:13)

The prophet Joel is speaking here of a truth of central importance in our relationship with God and neighbour, that God looks at what is deep inside us, at our innermost dispositions, rather than just at outward shows. Moreover, it is a “contrite, humbled heart” (Psalm 51: 19) which is most open to God’s redeeming grace, not a hard and stony one which has yet to be broken.

But if we rend our hearts with genuine grief for sin and return to the Lord, he who is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment” (Joel 2:12), we can confidently expect God to do what he has promised: “I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36: 26)

It is with such a new heart and spirit that we can love God with every fiber of our being and love one another as Christ loves us (cf. John 13:34).

4. The Lenten Experience of “Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving”

Our Lenten prayers should not only be confined to a series of formulated recitation but take on greater intensity as we journey with the Lord towards Jerusalem and his Passion and Death on the Cross.

Just as the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the desert to fast and pray (Mark 1: 12), so our prayers should be Spirit-filled – especially when joined with fasting and abstinence or with sacramental confession. For it is the Holy Spirit who can help us to experience what it means to encounter and follow Christ the Lord.

“Fasting” is intended to sensitize ourselves to the plight of the poor and needy and motivate us to help them. At the same time, Isaiah speaks strongly of “true fasting” as consisting of “setting free the oppressed”, “sharing bread with the hungry”, “bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house”, “clothing the naked” etc. (Isaiah 58:3-12).

“Almsgiving” is one of many aspects and ways of expressing our concern and care for the poor and others in need of our help either for themselves or in support of charitable causes. St Paul speaks of “an abundance for every good work” after saying that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7-8). He enjoins us to keep in mind the words of Jesus himself: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Hence it is no coincidence that Pope Francis, when speaking in his New Year message of the plight of migrants and refugees, urged people and nations positively to find ways and means of “welcoming” them, of “protecting” them, of “promoting” their human rights and/or of “developing” their human potential and of “integrating” them into the community. I strongly believe that the words of the Holy Father have wide and even general application to our care and concern for the poor and needy and vulnerable people, including “the Last, the Least and the Lost”.

5. A Challenge to All

Without “metanoia”, there can be no “New Evangelization” – one which is, in the words of St Pope John Paul II, new in ardor, new in its methods and new in its expression. This requires, among other things, a new focus on the re-evangelization especially of people who have fallen away from the faith or whose faith is in crisis.

Nothing could replace the “re-thinking”, the change of attitude and heart, the exemplar factors that must accompany people on our way or pilgrimage to true Conversion (Metanoia). When St Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council to strengthen the missionary spirit and in response to all the challenges of the modern world, he spoke of the need to open windows to let in fresh air.

Let the fresh air come in so that we may have an open heart to embrace, to dialogue and the courage to change. Let us not be disheartened by harsh realities or be confused by conflict or controversy but continue to hope and trust in Jesus, the Lord of history and of change. Whilst staying united in the faith as Catholics, we constantly need new ways and a renewed spirit to evangelize, both “in and out of season” (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2), so that the seeds of the gospel may take root, grow and yield abundant fruit.

6. A Special Word to Youth

We are in the Diocesan Year of Youth, declared in my Pastoral Letter for Advent. I wish to pray especially for and together with you this Lent. In this digital age of virtual reality, it is salutary for all of us to do “a reality check” now and again. Lent is a good time for this.

Even in the midst of the greatest difficulties, disappointments and frustrations, let no one give up but, instead, take encouragement from the merciful Lord, listen attentively to the promptings of the Spirit and learn to read the signs of the times.

Pray that we will all see the spring in Lent and have new life. Lent, like spring, is indeed a season for re-awakenings and new beginnings. So let us begin the journey, not alone but together.

7. Lent and Our Blessed Mother

I cannot conclude my Lenten message, which speaks repeatedly of the heart, without invoking with filial love the help and blessing of our Lady of Sheshan. She allows the sword of pain to pierce her heart. She shows us how to do likewise and live the Lenten experience as we journey with unfailing trust towards the dawn of Easter.

Pray for us, Blessed Mother, so that through your guidance and protection, we will be fully converted and configured to the Sacred Heart of your Son our Saviour!

May the Peace of the Lord be with you all!

† Michael Yeung
Bishop of Hong Kong
2018 Ash Wednesday

2018 年四旬期牧函

「活出四旬期的悔改（“Metanoia”）精神」

「應撕裂的，是你們的心，而不是你們的衣服；
你們應歸向上主你們的天主……」（岳二·13）

基督內親愛的弟兄姐妹：

感謝我們的天父因著祂的美善和慈悲，賜給我恩寵，讓我能夠在四旬期與你們分享來自我們主耶穌基督聖心的祝福和深深的喜樂。

1. 迎來春天的四旬期

今年四旬期首日「聖灰禮儀星期三」為二月十四日，適逢是中國農曆新年或「春節」開始前兩天；而恰巧的是，四旬期的原文，本意是「春天」。

春天是萬物復蘇、萬象更新的季節。「來，我們回到上主那裡去……祂要來到我們中間，有如秋雨，有如滋潤田地的春雨」（歐六·1,3）。

四旬期提醒我們，特別是準備在復活節前夕領受聖洗聖事而獲新生的人，上主以我們的名字召叫我們每一個。「我以你的名字召叫了你，你是我的」（依四十三·1）。

2. 「你們悔改，信從福音罷」！

主在約旦河裡受洗後，為了準備公開傳道，祂在曠野裡度過了四十天，禁食、祈禱、「受撒殫的試探」（谷一·9-13）。祂其後來到加里肋亞，宣講說：「時期已滿，天主的國臨近了，你們悔改，信從福音罷」（谷一·15）。

耶穌的這些話反映祂那迫切且持久的召叫，推動我們內心作出轉化歸依，在信仰中更新的奇妙禮物。為能充分領悟到《希臘新約》「悔改」的真義，我們必須明白到「悔改」是一項召叫，要求整個人——心神、思想和靈魂——作出徹底歸依、對我們主耶穌基督懷有信德，以及忠於福音。「你們應全心歸向我」（岳二·12）。歸依上主就是把整個心靈全交付予救主慈悲。

3. 「應撕裂的，是你們的心，

而不是你們的衣服」（岳二·13）

先知岳厄爾提及我們與天主和近人的關係中一個至關重要的真理，就是天主注視的是我們的內心深處、我們的內在性情，而不只是外在表露出來的行動。再者，最樂於接納天主那救贖恩寵的，是一顆「痛悔和謙卑的赤心」（詠五十一·19），而不是一顆尚待打破的鐵石心腸。

如果我們懷著對罪的真摯悲痛，撕裂我們的心，並歸向那位「寬仁慈悲，遲於發怒，富於慈愛，常懊悔降災」的上主（岳二，13），那麼，我們就能夠滿懷信心，期待天主履行諾言：「我還要賜給你們一顆新心，在你們五內放上一種新的精神，從你們的肉身內取去鐵石的心，給你們換上一顆血肉的心」（則三十六，26）。

只有懷著這樣的一顆新心和一種新精神，我們方能全心全意愛天主，並且彼此相愛，如同基督愛了我們（參看若十三，34）。

4. 四旬期「祈禱、禁食和施捨」的體驗

在四旬期內，我們的祈禱不應只侷限於反覆誦念經文，而是要注入更濃更深的感情，與上主一起前往耶路撒冷，踏上祂受難並死在十字架上的旅程。

就像聖神「催」耶穌到曠野裡去禁食和祈禱那樣（谷一，12），所以我們的祈禱也應當充滿聖神——特別是當祈禱與齋戒和告解聖事連在一起時。只有聖神才能幫助我們體會到與主基督相遇並跟隨祂的真正意義。

「齋戒」是為了提高我們對窮苦大眾的處境的關注，並且推動我們去幫助他們。依撒意亞先知極力指出，「真正的齋戒」包含「使受壓迫者獲得自由」、「將食糧分給飢餓的人」、「將無地容身的貧窮人領到自己的屋裡」、「見到赤身露體的人給他衣穿」等等（依五十八，3-12）。

「施捨」是表達我們關心窮苦大眾的許多方式之一，可以是幫助個別有需要人士或支持慈善事業。聖保祿表示「天主愛樂捐的人」，並進而提醒我們要「多行各種善事」（格後九，7-8）。他叮囑我們要記住耶穌說過的話：「施予比領受更為有福」（宗二十，35）。

因此，教宗方濟各在其新年文告中提到移民和難民的處境，促請世人和各國以積極的態度竭盡所能，「接納」他們、「保護」他們、「促進」他們的人權及／或「發展」他們的個人潛能，以及幫助他們「融入」社區。所涵蓋範圍一定更廣更闊，鼓勵我們要關懷和關注窮苦大眾和弱勢社群，包括社會上「末後無靠、卑微無助、失落無救」的一群。

5. 對所有人的挑戰

沒有「徹底悔改」，就不可能有「新福傳」——正如聖教宗若望保祿二世所言，新福傳需要新熱忱、新方法及新的表達方式。這當中包括確立重新福傳為新焦點，特別是對那些已經失落信仰或信仰陷入危機的人士。

沒有東西可以取代「重新思考」及態度和內心的改變，因為這些都是陪伴我們踏上真正轉化歸依之路或朝聖之旅所需的重要因素。當聖教宗若望二十三世召開梵蒂岡第二屆大公會

議來加強傳教精神及回應現代社會的一切挑戰時，他提到我們有必要打開窗戶，讓新鮮空氣進來。

讓新鮮空氣進來，能使我們擁有一顆開放的心去擁抱、交談，也能使我們擁有勇氣去改變。讓我們不被困惑和失意取代對主耶穌的信靠，祂是歷史和改變的主宰。團結在祂的教會內，「不論順境逆境」（弟後四·2），不斷恆以新的方式和煥發更新的精神來進行福傳，好讓福音的種子扎根、成長，並且結出纍纍的果實。

6. 對年輕人的贈言

現在正值教區青年年，而我已在《將臨期牧函》中作出此宣布。我希望在這個四旬期內特別為你們祈禱，也盼望與你們一起祈禱。在這個虛擬現實盛行的數碼年代，如果我們大家都不時「檢視自己的現實狀況」，想必是有益的做法。四旬期實在是進行這方面反省的合適時間。

大家即使處於極度艱難、失望和沮喪的時刻，也不要輕言放棄，而是從仁慈的上主那裡得到鼓勵，用心聆聽聖神的啟發，以及學習解讀時代的徵兆。

讓我們熱切祈禱，祈求我們都能在四旬期內看見春天並獲得新生命。四旬期猶如春天，實在是重新覺醒、重新開始的時節。就讓我們展開這個旅程，不是獨自一人，而是攜手同行。

7. 四旬期與我們的榮福聖母瑪利亞

在結束這篇出自肺腑的四旬期牧函之前，我懷著孝愛之情，懇求佘山聖母的幫助和祝福。她的心願為痛苦的利刃所刺透，使一切在信仰中追隨她聖子耶穌的人，懷著同樣堅定不移的信心，生活出四旬期的悔改精神，迎接復活的黎明。

榮福聖母瑪利亞，請為我們祈禱，好讓我們藉著你的引領和保護，完全轉化歸依並貼近你的聖子、我們救主的聖心！

願上主的平安與你們各人同在。

✠楊鳴章

天主教香港教區主教

二零一八年聖灰禮儀星期三