

Bishop's pastoral letter for Lent

Repent and believe in the Gospel! (Mark 1:15)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

These words from the Bible tell us Lent is coming and remind us to see life as a pilgrimage. We are seekers in mind and spirit. This journey that begins in the heart leads us to search for God's will in our lives.

A pilgrim is not a tourist. The goal of a pilgrimage far exceeds what any place that we can arrange to visit can offer. Rather, it is the experience of getting closer to Christ—to dwell in God—so we can carry out the mission that God has entrusted to us.

Recently, during the Christmas season, we celebrated the joy of God being with us. During the 40 days of Lent, we have to take a step further and learn how to walk with Jesus who is God Incarnate.

Our journey of conversion begins this Lent with Ash Wednesday on March 1. The entire Church will rekindle its effort in prayer, fasting, abstinence, sacrifice and works of mercy—to prepare to celebrate the Pascal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

In order to complement the diocese's pastoral orientation Care of Marriage, Family and Life, this year the preparatory committee for Lent proposes the theme Upholding marriage and family values with the love of God. It also promotes various activities regarding spirituality and charity.

The Gospel on the First Sunday of Lent points out, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). For this reason, learning to walk with Christ begins with listening to the Word of God.

Like the Magi who followed the star to find the holy infant who was born in a manger; or as King Herod bade the priests and scribes to look through the Hebrew scriptures to ascertain the birthplace of the new ruler, in the same way, if we observe closely and open ourselves humbly, we will discover that God has been sending us messages and enlightenment through the people and events around us.

Reading the Bible will surely provide us with nourishment for our spiritual life and acts of charity.

Lent and the bountiful liturgies of Holy Week are intended to prepare catechumens to receive the sacraments of initiation during the Easter Vigil. They will become sons and daughters of God, and members of the Church.

When the entire Church walks with the catechumens on this journey of faith, the faithful will come to experience the presence of Christ in the liturgies and in the sacraments.

Let Christ lead each of us to walk steadfastly on the path of life and overcome all kinds of limitations and trials in order to arrive safely at our eternal home in Heaven.

The conversion of our hearts also prompts us to pay attention to those around us. If we are familiar with the Word of God, we will have the strength to respond to others' needs and become a Christian who walks with others.

Besides defending the values of marriage, family and life, the Church should also follow the exhortation of Pope Francis who says, "The Church's task is often like that of a field hospital" (Amoris Laetitia, 291).

The Church must also walk with the weak and wounded among God's children, restoring their faith and hope. I call on all parishes, schools and diocesan organisations, especially those agencies that offer social services and counselling, to study Amoris Laetitia, the exhortation by Pope Francis, carefully and follow its pastoral suggestions, accompanying each couple, each family, as well as each wounded individual in facing their problems. We should help them through their crises and help them to find ways to resolve difficulties.

In the recent Jubilee of Mercy, we have experienced the merciful face of God the Father who helps us find the strength for renewal and for moving ahead. We understand that, only by relying on the mercy of God and cooperating with God's grace, can we continue to grow and make progress in faith.

May every member of our diocese extend the spirit of mercy and reach out to whomever is in need in society, to assist the weak and the poor and be generous in supporting various fund-raising activities during Lent, to minister to those who are hungry and thirsty.

I wish to remind everyone that to be merciful does not mean tolerating unjust behaviour and conditions. On the contrary, the mercy of God the Father impels us to take on the role of a prophet, condemning clearly the factors that harm life, marriage and family.

Only a more wholesome and equitable social environment can ensure the common good and happiness of the people. Recent studies show that in Hong Kong long work hours and exorbitant property prices are rampant. They upset normal family life. We pray that all sectors can work together to develop social institutions that are good for the family.

The family is where every person gets rest and nourishment, and where life grows healthily. May the Word of God be at the centre of each family, accompanying the members in their life's journey, as they work hard to foster communion and mutual reliance at home. Where warmth and love exist in the family, everyone will long to come home.

Life's journey points to our eternal home in Heaven. That is truly where we reside in eternity. May we encourage each other, follow the footsteps of Christ and live out—beginning with marriage and the family—our care for each other, and communion with one another.

Let us be a messenger of love, respond actively to God's call and take part in the holy task of building up the Kingdom of Heaven.

May God grant you and your family grace and peace!

**+ John Cardinal Tong
Bishop of Hong Kong
14 February 2017
Feast of Saint Cyril and Methodius**

湯漢樞機 2017 年四旬期牧函

主內親愛的弟兄姊妹：

「你們悔改，信從福音罷！」（谷 1:15）

這句聖言告示我們一年一度的四旬期又來臨了，並提醒我們視生命為朝聖之旅，我們都是精神和靈性的探索者。這個從內心開始的旅程，引領我們尋找天主在我們身上的計劃。朝聖者不是旅遊人士，朝聖的目的地遠超過任何一個我們預先安排到訪的地方，且是一個與基督接近的經歷，使我們的生命有穩妥的安頓，好能履行天主交託給我們的使命。在過去的聖誕期，我們慶祝了「天主與我們同在」的喜樂，在四旬期我們要更進一步學習與降生成人的主耶穌同行。

三月一日的聖灰禮開展今年四旬期悔改皈依的旅程，整個教會將加強祈禱、守齋、克己、犧牲和愛德行動，以準備慶祝耶穌基督的逾越奧蹟。為配合教區「關顧婚姻、家庭與生命」的牧民方向，今年四旬期運動籌備委員將以「恩愛·回家」為主題，推動各項有關靈修與愛德活動。

四旬期首主日福音指出：「人生活不只靠餅，也靠天主口中所發的一切言語。」（瑪 4：4）因此，學習與基督同行，應以聆聽天主聖言為起點。正如耶穌誕生後，東方賢士藉星光引導，找到誕生在馬槽的聖嬰；又如黑落德王吩咐司祭長和經師查考猶太經卷，以確定新生君王的誕生地；同樣，只要留心觀察，謙虛受教，我們就不難發現天主藉身邊的人和事物發出訊息和啟迪，而閱讀聖經必能為我們提供靈修生活和愛德行動的滋養。

四旬期及聖週豐富的禮儀，是為準備慕道者在逾越節守夜禮中領受入門聖事，成為天主的子女、教會的一分子。當整個教會陪伴著慕道者行走這條信仰之旅時，信眾將可在禮儀和聖事中體驗基督的臨在，讓祂領導著我們每一個人堅穩地走在生命的道路上，跨越種種局限和困難，安抵天上永恆的家鄉。

內心的皈依也促使我們把注意力轉向別人。如果我們多讀天主聖言，必能有力對別人的需要作出回應，成為與人同行的基督徒。教會除按聖言捍衛婚姻、家庭和生命的價值外，應如教宗方濟各所說：「教會的任務像是戰地醫院」（《愛的喜樂》291），也必須與軟弱和遭受創傷的子女同行，以恢復他們的信心和希望。我呼籲各堂區、學校和教會機構，特別是提供社會服務和輔導的單位，在 2017 年內積極研習教宗方濟各《愛的喜樂》勸諭，並按勸諭的牧民建議，陪伴每一對夫婦、每一個家庭和每一位受傷的個體，面對他們的問題，幫助他們跨越危機，找到處理困難的方法。

在過去的慈悲禧年，我們經驗了天父慈悲的面容，如何幫助我們找到更新和向前邁進的力量。我們明白，唯有依靠天主的慈悲和與天主的恩寵合作，才可以在信德上不斷進步和成長。願教區內的每一位成員，延續慈悲禧年的精神，對社會上有需要的人伸出援手，扶弱濟貧，並慷慨解囊，大力支持四旬期運動的各項籌募活動，幫助有需要者紓饑解渴。

我願意提醒各位，慈悲並不等如容忍不義的行為和狀況；反之，天父的慈悲催促我們負起先知的職責，明確地指摘那些不利於生命、婚姻和家庭的因素，因為更完善的社會環境，才能保障大眾的利益和幸福。近期有調查顯示香港的長工時及高樓價異常嚴重，衝擊著普羅大眾正常的家庭生活，期望各界能群策群力，確保社會制度有利家庭的發展。

家庭是每個人獲得休息和補養的場所，也是生命健康成長的園地。願所有家庭成員以天主的話為中心，陪伴他們行走人生旅程，努力培養共融和互相依靠的家庭氣氛，使各人因著家庭的溫暖和恩愛，時常渴望回家。

人生的旅程指向天上永恆的家鄉，那裡才是我們生命永久安居之所。讓我們互相勉勵，跟隨基督的腳步，從婚姻和家庭開始，活出彼此之間的關愛與共融精神，成為傳遞愛的使者，俾積極回應天主的召叫，參與建設天國的神聖任務。

願主賜給你們及你們的家人恩寵和平安！

十湯漢樞機

天主教香港教區主教

二零一七年二月十四日

聖濟利祿及聖默多狄紀念日