

STANDING WITH YOU STANDING UP FOR YOU



Pastoral letter

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**"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road,
while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32)**

STANDING WITH YOU



Dear beloved brothers and sisters,

As I begin my fifth year as your bishop, and as our world continues to go through many storms and storms, I think of the passage from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus tells us how to put the Word into practice by recalling

the building of a house on a rock: "The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock." (Mt 7:25)

A clear vision

The question that is always on my mind as a pastor is this: on what rock are we building the life of our couples and families, the life of our religious communities, the life of our Christian communities, the life of our diocesan Church, the life of society?

In recent months, many events have touched the hearts and minds of many people: in addition to the international health crisis, I am thinking of the urgent climate issues, the forest fires, the floods, the various political crises experienced in several countries, the challenge of coexistence and mutual respect, etc. On the side of the Church, there is no shortage of trials and challenges: hostile speeches are multiplying, indifference is increasing, and religious illiteracy is growing. In these difficult times, many are more inclined to believe in their doubts and to doubt their faith.

Are we going to let all this eat away at us? Are we going to give up and forfeit or, worse, declare bankruptcy? No!

Let us remember what St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Christ Jesus died; moreover, he rose again, he is at the right hand of God, he intercedes for us; so who can separate us from the love of Christ? distress? anguish? persecution? hunger? want? danger? the sword? (...) Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:34b - 35; 39)

Let us be seduced by Christ

As we begin a new pastoral year, following my previous pastoral letters, let us revisit the very foundations of our faith. As pastor of the Diocesan Church of Saint-Hyacinthe, this is the vision that I invite us to deepen, day by day, in order to continue, with credibility, in all simplicity and truth, to bring the joy of the Gospel, to spread the hope that dwells within us and to be, more and more, witnesses of the immense tenderness of the Lord for the human family. "O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed." (Jer 20:7)

As you know, I insist time and again on the importance of a personal encounter with Christ. This is what makes us live, or should make us live each day. I like to emphasize the importance of rooting all the facets of our daily life in the heart of God in order to accomplish the mission that He entrusts to us and to each other. More than ever, let us give ourselves the means to be permanently connected to the source of our faith, Jesus Christ.

Following in the footsteps of so many generations of believing sisters and brothers who precede us, following in the footsteps of so many venerable, blessed and holy people who have marked the history of our diocesan Church, let us walk in the footsteps of the Risen One. It is in this that we fully assume our originality as missionary disciples in today's world.

In this anxious world, too often in frantic search of selfish and sterile goods, let us propose the freshness and fertility of the Gospel, let us deploy new modes of relationship and hospitality among ourselves as well as with our brothers and sisters in humanity, in harmony with Creation, God's gift. Following in the footsteps of Mary, "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38) and in the footsteps of Saint Joseph in this year dedicated to him, let us live with confidence and serenity the commitment of our baptism, soberly and humbly dedicated to the service that has been entrusted to us in our lives as couples and families, in our Christian communities, in our religious communities, in the diocesan Church of Saint-Hyacinthe, and in society.

When we reread the history of the Church over the past two thousand years, we see how regularly it has had difficulties to overcome, times of crisis to go through, periods of adjustment to be made. If we look at our own personal journey, we will also recognize such moments because all living beings go through crises of growth and adjustment.

What really matters cannot be measured. Let us beware of statistics and numbers that might impress and discourage us. They are misleading. I remember hearing in my youth, during a conversation with Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, how his concern was not the number of people present at this or that celebration, but rather whether the people present on that occasion were truly encountering Christ in the depths of their hearts and lives. I have shared this concern since that conversation and I carry it today as a bishop: how can we help our brothers and sisters in humanity to live a personal encounter with Christ and have it truly change their lives? This is the challenge of our mission.

Let us listen to the Holy Spirit

The vocation of the Church - in fact, our identity as missionary disciples - is to proclaim the Gospel, to share it with those around us, to translate it into concrete actions on a daily basis with the strengths and weaknesses that are ours. In order to accomplish this mission while remaining rooted in the heart of God, Jesus promised, He does not leave us alone. The Holy Spirit, God's gift for the life of the world, is given to us: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (Jn 14:16-17)

Regularly, I hear people say: "This must change in the Church"! That's fine! Where do we start? What if it were to change first in each one of us? Without welcoming the breath of the Spirit in each one of us, will it be possible? It is easy to want to see changes in others... but what about in ourselves?

Pope Francis has just reminded us that "we can only reform the Church by discerning God's will in our daily lives, by being transformed, guided by the Holy Spirit. This transformation requires a personal reformation. Let us allow the

Holy Spirit, God's gift in our hearts, to remind us of Jesus' teaching in order to put it into practice." (Prayer Intention for August 2021)

Yes, dear beloved brothers and sisters, it is indeed in each one of us, in the deepest heart, the place of personal encounter with the Lord, that everything begins. Let us dare to assume our share of co-responsibility in this desired transformation...

Let us go forward together...

One of the Gospel pericopes that has helped me in my ministry for many years is the account of the appearance of the disciples at Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35. Here we discover the pedagogy of Jesus who walks with the two disciples, listens to them, teaches them, opens their eyes. At night, they return to Jerusalem to testify to what they have experienced on the road.

Following the fraternal reunion at the beginning of this pastoral year, with the support of the diocesan team, I invite all Christians to go off the beaten path by listening to one another, by committing ourselves generously, by cooperating not only in the parish but also in the region, by being close to one another, by journeying together, and by daring to become daring witnesses of the Gospel in action.



**"I invite you to get off
the beaten path
by walking together..."**

A synodal experience

On October 17, at the invitation of Pope Francis, in our diocese as in all dioceses of the world, we will celebrate the opening of a synodal experience. As the Pope has repeatedly reminded us, this will not be a "merely administrative or structural act" nor will it be a kind of manifestation of "parliamentarianism" or "ideological confrontation". The Pope invites us to an experience of "discernment in the Holy Spirit" and of "co-responsibility" for a conversion of hearts. I dare to hope that many of us will participate in this experience with joy, kindness and concern.

On our marks...

Our foreheads are marked with the sacred signs. Our faith is Christological, solidary and missionary. In the footsteps of Christ, under the impulse of the Spirit, let us advance together, as workers of peace, in the midst of the meanders of daily life. Let us stand firm in faith, charity and hope.

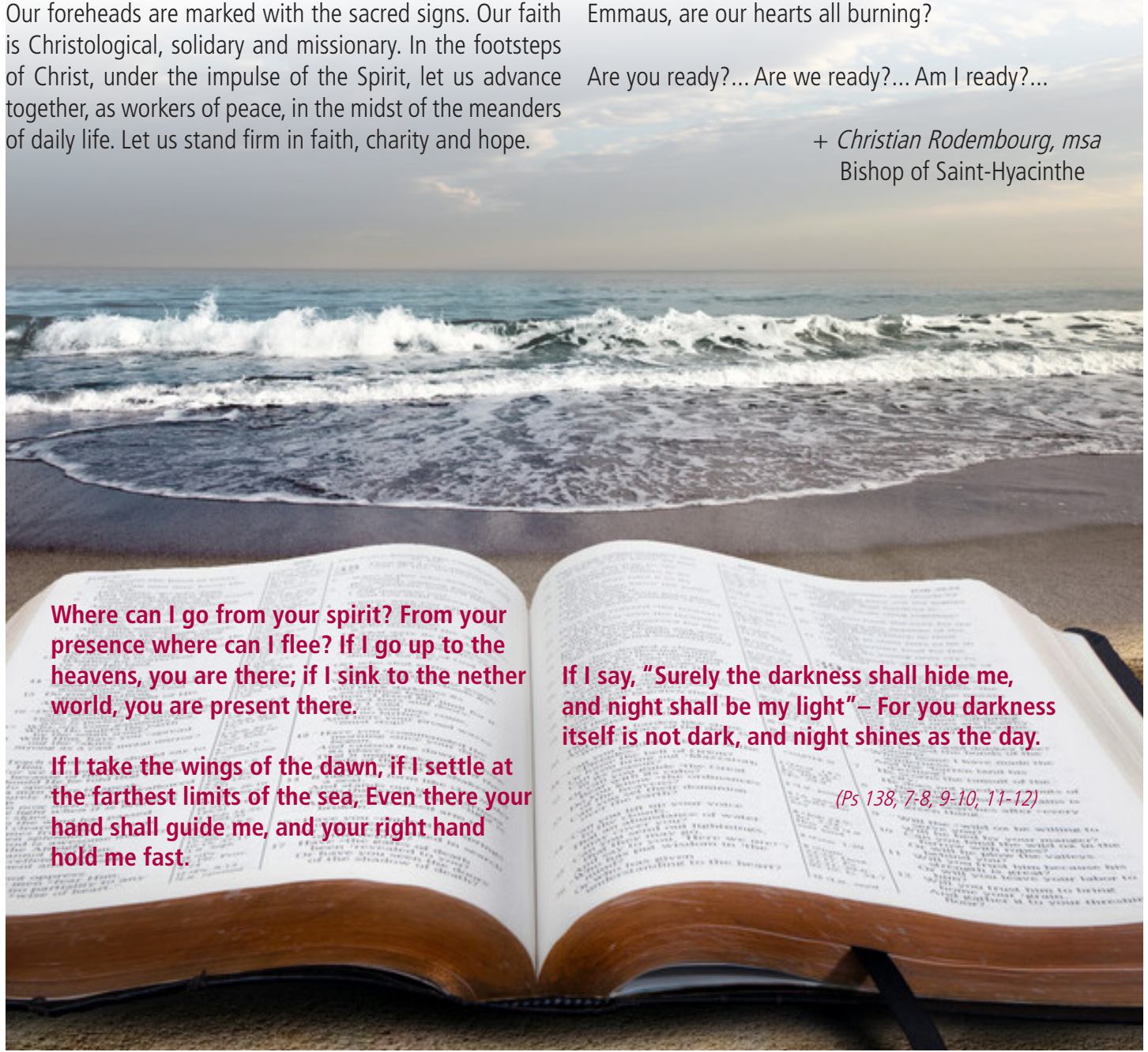
The Kingdom of God is our horizon. It is there, close to us. Let us take with us only the love and immense tenderness of God.

Far from giving up the fight, let us STAND UP! Christ is standing. He is on the road with us. Let us stand WITH and FOR those to whom the Lord sends us, day after day.

To those who welcome us as well as to those who drive us away, let us dare to proclaim the Good News: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive the Good News." (Mt 11:5) Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, are our hearts all burning?

Are you ready?... Are we ready?... Am I ready?...

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Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence where can I flee? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world, you are present there.

If I take the wings of the dawn, if I settle at the farthest limits of the sea, Even there your hand shall guide me, and your right hand hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light"— For you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day.

(Ps 138, 7-8, 9-10, 11-12)