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THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HONG KONG

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To: All Parish Priests

Dear Reverend Father,

Education Day (27th September 2020)

“Come, Lord Jesus!”

Every year the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong designates the fourth Sunday of September as Education Day in order to reaffirm and enhance the importance of education, both for individuals and for society at large.

The theme of the Education Day this year is “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” Our Lord Jesus once commanded, “Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds.” (Rv 22:12) We all are followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, regardless of the impacts of our ever-changing society, we should adhere to His teachings faithfully.

Let us review the current state of our society while contemplating upon God’s word in the Bible. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen our convictions, help us fulfil our roles faithfully with gratitude, goodwill and courage in this secular world, where good and evil coexist, and unceasingly hope for the glorious coming of the Kingdom of Christ Our Lord, which is full of love, truth, justice, and peace.

I sincerely hope that you will help convey the message to your parishioners during the Sunday Masses to be celebrated on that day. For this purpose, I have attached herewith some materials for your reference.

According to the Chancery Notice dated 7.9.2020, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the special collection for the promotion of Catholic education, to be taken up during Mass on this occasion, is to be postponed until further notice by the Chancery.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you again for your support and guidance to our schools. May God bless you.

Respectfully yours in Christ,



(Lau Chiu Yin, Peter)

Episcopal Delegate for Education

Education Day 2020 (Sunday, September 27, 2020)

“Come, Lord Jesus!”

Crises and Difficulties

Since the middle of last year, Hong Kong has witnessed repeated incidents of social protests causing social unrest. **Political conflicts** arising from the Amendment Draft of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, the National Security Law of HKSAR and the postponement of the Legislative Council Election scheduled for September 2020, have triggered off civil strife between the police and mostly young people, giving rise to many ugly scenes of violence. Society at large, countless social groupings and even families have been severely torn apart owing to political dissent. In addition, the COVID-19 **pandemic** has ravaged the world since the beginning of this year, with over 5,000 confirmed cases and more than 103 deaths in Hong Kong. Schools have been closed for many months. Restaurants, etc. have been intermittently suspended, businesses have stagnated, employees have become unemployed or under-employed, and people's livelihood has been hard hit. Students cannot learn in the usual manner and all normal activities of our society have been seriously impaired. In recent months, **major powers** in the international political arena have been **contending** for their dominance in such areas as science and technology, medical care, trade, finance, military capabilities and diplomacy. As an international financial centre and a technologically advanced city, Hong Kong will inevitably be caught up in many of such vortexes. Moreover, the recent implementation of the territory-wide anti-epidemic test has triggered some heated discussions on innovative devices or practices made possible by technological advances, such as the Health Code and the Social Credit System. It is deeply felt that **consensus is hard to find** and the people of Hong Kong have a long way to go before hopes of social reconciliation materialize.

In the past six months, school teachers have been very busy coping with new teaching modes and rearranging scheduled activities, whereas students have been adapting to the unconventional learning modes. Classroom teaching has to be carried out in a **virtual classroom** where faces of teachers and students only appear on the screen. Teachers may not be able to immediately perceive students' mastery of what is being taught, while students may not have grasped it thoroughly. Both teachers and students have to adapt to the new way of how assignments are to be submitted and marked. Students may worry that they will not be able to catch up with their school work. They may feel annoyed by being stuck at home all day. They may even worry about their parents' employment which might be adversely affected by the epidemic, and extra expenses at the start of the new school term might cause their families greater financial hardship.

What is lamentable is that our society has been **overwhelmed with divergent messages** from the media. The so-called “facts” as reported in the press may have occasionally been distorted, obscured and misleading, overstated and fawning, blurred and misfocused, which are most unfortunate. They make people feel helpless, leading eventually to delusion of authenticity, muddling up of information and disinformation, **confounding one's ability to tell right from wrong**, thus causing injustice in society. What worries Christians most is whether in the future a highly technologically advanced civilized society will, in the name of protecting public and private interests or consolidating governance, **be keen to monitor or even to manipulate** thoughts and behaviors of its people. Such a society might be, knowingly or unknowingly, on the verge of **trampling on** the

free-will and the dignity of mankind, and desecrating God's sacred portrait imprinted on the human soul, which displays all the good and beauty in its capacity, and its desire for truth and love, as well as for wisdom edified by reasoning.

These personal, family, and social rifts and crises have frustrated and disappointed many people. But there are people in society who adhere to their principles and **will not lose hope!** The Church, a group of humble, meek and mild **Christians**, is forever looking forward to Christ, who died but has resurrected——for when He comes again, it will be the ultimate salvation of humanity. This modest small group imitates the believers of the early Church, holding onto a joyful hope and shouting amidst the difficulties:

"Come! Lord Jesus!"

Outpouring of Grace

History tells us that the Apostles and Christians of the first generation were **oppressed** by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. This has given **impetus for the spread of Christ's gospel** and resulted in the establishment of communities of believers in Judah, Samaria, Caesarea, Damascus, Cyprus, Antioch and other distant areas. It demonstrates that abundant grace gushes out from adversities.

The early Christians were also persecuted for refusing to declare that Caesar, their ruler and Emperor of the Roman Empire, was a god. They firmly believed that Lord Jesus Christ, who was put to death and has resurrected, is the Son of the only eternal God. They led a life that was full of holiness, benevolence, peace and justice. They refused to enter the Colosseum to watch criminals and slaves fighting to death and they unconditionally released their slaves out of love. The Church Fathers at that time criticized the Romans for their decadent life style in pursuit of luxury and pleasure, which made those in power feel rather threatened. As a result, Christians were brutally persecuted and killed for the first 300 years or so. They were barred from participation in political life or holding official positions. They were banned from public assemblies and had to meet in catacombs, where they hid and lived in **long darkness**.

But these early Christians firmly believed in the promise of Lord Jesus Christ to come again! They still cherished hope in the face of adversity, anticipating that He would be "coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Lk 21:27), and recalled His instructions: "Remember! I'm coming soon..... I will repay everyone according to their behaviour" (Rv. 22:12). Whenever they met, they greeted one another saying, "Come, Lord Jesus!", so as **to echo and to intensify the urgent cry for strength** in hardship, to encourage each other to remain steadfast in their faith, while longing for justice and peace. The Christian faith was finally granted legal recognition by the Roman Empire in 313 A.D., and has spread all over the world to this day.

"Come! Lord Jesus!"

Strengthening the Virtue of Hope

When people are **in good times**, especially in an affluent society where advanced economic and technological developments have submerged people in virtual realities that progressively advocate automation and full control over everything via big data, people will easily yield to temptations of all kinds and tend to "**become drowsy** from carousing and drunkenness" while

hunting for power, wealth and interests. People will also incline to focus solely on secular worries and “anxieties of daily life,” (Luke 21:34) suffocating their pursuit of humanistic values and realization of truth, goodness and beauty in the human nature. Similarly, in good times, Christians may ignore the Christian way of life and even become **indifferent to God**. “..... In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.” (Mt 24:38-39) There is no longing for or even the awareness for the coming of Christ at any time, let alone “staying awake and pray”. This is likened to children who, incapable of self-control, indulge themselves in online videos or games on the night of a weekend when their parents are out at social functions. How would they possibly want their parents to come home very soon and push them to study?

God puts us **through difficulties and crises** in order to rekindle our desire for noble values so that we will seek the ultimate meaning of life and strengthen our faith, “knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint...” (Rm 5:3-5) Only in the face of severe adversities will man be determined to pursue virtuous principles, and Christians may suddenly realize that deep in their souls they are really longing for the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” The ever-changing world with its excessive noise and absurdity makes us **truly yearn** for the return of Christ the Prince of Peace. Just as most students, who are taken aback upon realizing that the ineffectiveness of their learning is threatening their academic future, after the long absence of companionship in a group learning environment coupled with slackened external supervision. Only then would they begin to desire for an early return to normal school life in a place most conducive to learning while in the company of teachers and friends.

Adversity may be a veiled blessing in disguise and we should be grateful for it.

“Come! Lord Jesus!”

Repent and Be Alert

Since we **long for the Prince of Peace and the new heavens and earth** to appear in real life, we should not just dream or talk about it, but should repent and lead a righteous life. In the Gospel (the 26th Sunday of the Ordinary Period) Jesus told a parable of the two sons (Mt. 21:28-32). A son said, “Yes, sir” to his father’s instructions, but did nothing. The other son said, “I will not” but later obeyed the orders and carried out his father's will. Jesus used this to accuse the chief priests and the elders of the people for failing to follow the teachings of John the Baptist and repent in time, so that tax collectors and prostitutes entered the kingdom of God before them.

Integrity entails the **consistency of words and deeds**. Verifying one’s words with one’s deeds is the fundamental of really knowing a person. We teach our students and children such morals and expect the same of interpersonal or international relationships. The same is true for the God-Man relationship and communication. If our longing is no better than lip service without repentance and correspondingly appropriate behavior, how can we call upon Our Lord Jesus to come soon, let alone to “have the strength to stand before the Son of Man” when He returns? (Lk 21:36)

Immediately after telling the parable of the two sons, Jesus told the parables of the wicked husbandmen and of the wedding feast. It clearly shows that everyone must have sincerity and good deeds, that is, tenants should pay with their produce on time, whereas guests should wear a formal dress to the wedding banquet, so as to be worthy of the return of Christ and the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Bible repeatedly reminds us to be honest and **sincere in repentance**, to understand that suffering is often caused by man's own sins and to plead for God's forgiveness and help just as the author of the Psalm (Ps. 25:4-9). We must trust in God's righteousness to reward the good and to punish the evil, and should praise God for His mercy to convert the wicked (Ezk 18:25-28). We should not "grasp" what we think we deserve, but imitate Christ's mind and heart to "empty" and "humble" oneself before the Lord (Ph 2:6-11). We should also "be of the same love", "do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, be humble", "each looking out not for his own interests, but everyone for those of others." (Ph 2:1-5).

Let us contemplate, starting with our daily personal (*as students*) and community life, and sincerely repent for our shortcomings as we long for the new heavens and new earth, and cry out "Come, Lord Jesus!"

- For not cherishing grace bestowed and for our omissions in community affairs; (*Students: late submission or no submission of, or copying others' homework assignments*)
- For treating lightly others' goodwill and efforts; (*Students: ignoring the advice of parents and teachers*)
- For criticizing or complaining maliciously about people or things; (*Students: resenting schoolmates*)
- For inflicting physical or psychological harm on others in words and deeds; (*Students: speaking ill of others*)
- For being stubborn, arrogant and failing to respect different viewpoints; (*Students: quarrelling with others*)
- For ignoring others' dignity in pursuit of power or fortune; (*Students: ganging up and bullying classmates*)
- For the lukewarm attitude adopted when testifying to truth, justice, love, and peace when necessary; (*Students: muddling along in life and in one's studies*)
- For the uninterested and indifferent attitude towards the coming of the Kingdom of God; (*Students: living aimlessly*)
- For... May we reflect deeply, repent sincerely and be converted whole-heartedly.

"Come! Lord Jesus!"

Steadfast Faith

Some Christian philosophers describe despair as a **process of soul searching**. In the Old Testament, Job faced a series of misfortunes and sickness. When he debated with friends and dialogued with God, he completely turned every inch of his soul over. Finally, he revived in the same heart and soul a **much deeper faith**. When Christians are on the brink of desperation, they must humbly acknowledge the omnipotence and infinite wisdom of God and entrust themselves to His just and benevolent care.

This is likened to an incident that happened more than six years ago to a veteran media person who holds the conviction of "With Truth in Heart, With a Pen in Hand; To be Free is to be Selfless and Fearless." He was then a former chief editor of a newspaper known for its objectivity and impartiality. He was brutally attacked and severely wounded, not for any known cause related to personal grievances. He and his family still firmly believe that everything is in the hands of the Lord and that everything happens with the Lord's will. While still in their agony they encouraged everyone concerned to remain faithful to their posts and fulfill their personal duties, using the Bible quotes of "..... **all things work together for good**" (Rm 8:28 English Standard Version).

“.....we boast of your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions you endure.” (2 Th 1:4) “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1) We worry about the future changes in society, whether the glittering of the past will fade or even disappear. Yet Christians firmly believe that just as Jesus can bring Lazarus back to life, even if the present suffering is likened to darkness in the tomb, it can be perceived as the **pain before the birth of a new life**. We will still wait patiently with anticipation. (Jn 16:21)

“Come! Lord Jesus!”

What to Do as the Lord Is Coming Soon

The political situation of our society will be affected by changes in the domestic, foreign or international power struggles. The impacts of the epidemic will also fluctuate. Thus the social and political situation is complex and ever-changing. But we firmly believe that the new heavens and earth full of love, faith, justice, and peace of Christ the King will one day come (Ps 85:11). At this moment, we will not wait passively, but will **wait for the Lord with unwavering faith**.

Waiting is the most important task for Christians at this moment! In the time of the Old Testament, the Chosen People experienced long years of wandering and waiting to be nurtured unto a nation with a strong faith in God. This is an important part of His redemption plan. The Chosen People must come to know more of their God for He is not only "to mark our sins", but also to give "kindness and full redemption." (Ps 130:3,7).

If the coming of someone or something is meaningful to us, we will naturally prepare for it properly. How does the Bible teach us to wait for the Lord? God is not only interested in the moment He comes when we must be like wise virgins, awake, carrying a lamp with oil prepared, and opening the door to greet Him. The Lord pays even more attention to **what we have been doing when He is yet to come**. It is for us to be the faithful and prudent servant taking good care of the household entrusted by the master, and distribute to them their food at the proper time. When the master arrives, he will put the servant in charge of all his property. (Mt 24:45-47)

Therefore, we must **be faithful to the role entrusted** by the Lord to everyone. We need to be honest and earnestly fulfill our personal and social responsibilities with integrity. Meanwhile, to fulfil our professional obligations, we should strictly abide by the professional codes of different industries, whether they are of civil servants, media and news, medical or legal fields, teachers, social work, accounting and finance, culture and art, information technology, engineering and other sectors..... It is high time that Christians studied the principles and contents of the **Church's Social Teachings** which is a treasure accumulated over the recent centuries. When applying its principles to social ethics, its **prophetic teachings and admonitions for the secular world** should be heeded. Its spirit serves as a good navigating guide and reference for social participation.

As Catholic teachers and principals in the education sector, we **promote our core values and principles** by endeavouring to advocate and to speak the **truth**; to uphold **justice** in our relationships with God and men; to perform acts of **charity** for the poor and the weak; to respect, protect and treasure **life**; to safeguard the status and functions of the **family**, and to nurture harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Moreover, in accordance with the Code for the Education Profession of Hong Kong, we need to fulfil our obligations to the education profession, students, colleagues, employers, parents and the public. For those who are students, we should focus on our studies, study hard, and at the same time **grasp** fully and **comprehensively all that has been happening locally and globally**, and reflect upon their impacts on us.

The Lord is the Master of human history. Although we live in a constantly changing world, we are grateful for the people and things in Hong Kong in the past few decades. We should **cherish and give witness** to the life-long struggle of our past generations, which has forged the spiritual and material civilization of our Hong Kong society, shaping its outlook and instilling in it all the essential characteristics of a cosmopolitan city. Meanwhile, we all are to be responsible for and earnestly look forward to the future of our society. Our students should make good use of the gifts God has given everyone, including our priceless lives, precious time, learning opportunities as well as caring family members and mentors. They should **equip themselves well** so that each will become an instrument of the Lord, and contribute to building a civilized society filled with justice and love in accordance with God's will, thus helping write a new page in the history of Hong Kong.

In addition, we must also **listen to people** in great despair, with whom we come into contact, especially those who are in depression, with worries or resentment, so as to understand and empathize with their trauma, to exchange views and feelings with them, and to broaden each other's horizons as well. We should **accompany them** as much as possible, and **share with them** our own transformational experiences in tough times, so as to bring about hope to the traumatized. We should form with other Christian believers such **communities that are "always alert with steadfast hope"** to counsel and encourage one another—— "putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet that is hope for salvation; admonish the idle, cheer the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient with all. See that no one returns evil for evil Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks" (1Th 5:8,14-18)

"Come! Lord Jesus!"

How to Do as the Lord Is Coming Soon

Because we **have full trust in God** who is rich in justice, we will still have joy in our hearts **even in yet greater darkness** and more difficult situations. "I await the day of distress that will come upon the people who attack us. For though the fig tree blossom not nor fruit be on the vines, Though the yield of the olive fail and the terraces produce no nourishment, Though the flocks disappear from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, Yet will I rejoice in the LORD and exult in my saving God, GOD, my Lord, is my strength" (Hab 3:17-19)

"Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer" (Rm 12:12) because "..... all things work for good for those who love God" (Rm 8:28)

May we stand firm in our faith and wait for the Lord, with courage, joy, patience, kindness, and compassion, to reveal the beauty of our hearts as a portrait of God, and to recognize the Christ in others, to **ignite hope together**, and to wait for the Light.

Let us be full of gratitude and anticipation, and shout to the Lord in our hearts with all the brothers and sisters,

"Come! Lord Jesus!"

Education Day

27th September 2020

“Come, Lord Jesus!”

Prayer of the Faithful (for reference only)

1. Let us pray for the Church. May the Lord enlighten the Church with Truth, so that in the midst of social injustice, persecutions and hardships, she can uphold the teachings of Holy Scripture and her Social Teachings, hope constantly, promote justice, practise charity, make peace and give witness to our faith. For this, we pray to the Lord.
2. Let us pray for all in authority, including local government officials, education policy-makers. May the Lord grant them true wisdom, broad minds, big and humble hearts so that they may respect and appreciate educational beliefs and ethos of different school sponsors, fostering effective collaboration between the government and various school sponsoring bodies. For this, we pray to the Lord.
3. Let us pray for all Catholic schools. May the Lord bless that school life there may reveal the Way, the Truth and the Life of Jesus, nurture spiritual growth, preach the gospel, help students find meaning in life and follow Christ, develop their potential, and live a respectful life with dignity and integrity. For this, we pray to the Lord.
4. Let us pray for all educators. May the Holy Spirit grant them wisdom, initiatives and motivations, love and endurance, hope and confidence as they walk along with their students in the midst of confused values, distorted truth, anxieties, chaos and frustrations. For this, we pray to the Lord.
5. Let us pray for all families. May the Lord be with every family, so that its members will treat one another with love, patience, understanding, forbearance, forgiveness and self-sacrifice. May the Lord especially bless the parents, so that they can bring up their children by setting good examples and teaching them to seek throughout life the truth as revealed by Christ. For this, we pray to the Lord.
6. Let us pray for our students. May the Lord protect and enlighten them, so that guided by the Gospel spirit they will grow in wisdom and be able to resist every temptation, to choose what is good, to renounce all vices, to love and cherish life, to constantly enrich and equip themselves so as to serve others. For this, we pray to the Lord.