

“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24)

**Pastoral Letter of His Eminence
John Cardinal Njue**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEASON OF LENT AND EASTER 2020

To all Christians and people of goodwill in the Archdiocese of Nairobi:

My dear Christians and all the people of goodwill in the Archdiocese of Nairobi:

The grace and peace of the Lord be with you. With this pastoral letter I wish to greet you all, as we journey through this season of Lent and look forward to celebrating the central mysteries of our faith - the Lord’s suffering, death and resurrection, and the salvation he brought to us.

This time I wish to centre my reflections on a Pauline verse, found in the letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians: “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). I wish to share with you of my thoughts on this text in the light of our ongoing battle against the flesh, the world and the devil, as well as our struggle against corruption and our obligation to steward our natural national resources.

I. OUR LENTEN JOURNEY AND INNER HEALING

When we decided to believe in Christ and receive the Sacrament of Baptism we received the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is given to us in embryonic form in Baptism. The same Spirit transforms our being from within, bringing about the fullness of Christ’s life in us by making us conform gradually, through progressive growth, to a greater likeness of Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20), said St. Paul.

This life in the Spirit will have its final completion and fullness only in the life to come (cf. Rm 8:9-11). Hence here we are on a journey, already under the influence and work of the Holy Spirit, but it hasn’t reached its fullness yet.

In this world we Christians are caught between two forces: the power of evil and the Spirit of Christ, between the worldliness in us and the spiritual (cf. Gal 5:17). We are to live according to the Spirit, the new principle of Christ-like operations within us (cf. Gal 5:22-23). It isn't easy because of our fallen nature. St Paul speaks of the consequences of our fallen nature in what he calls the "works of the flesh". They are, "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness and the like." It is these works of the flesh that we crucify, that we die to. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:19-24).

The Spirit has created the new life in Christ living within us, a life "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). He fosters it, stimulates its growth, purifies us from any obstacle to its maturity. He brings this life to its fullness in the proportion that we allow this Spirit to be the normative influence guiding us in our moral choices that determine our true growth in Christ Jesus.

Towards this interior healing and growth, during every Lenten season, the Church proposes to us three traditional means: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Personal prayer intensified by fasting and active charity can assist us to put the works of the flesh to death.

In **prayer** we defeat the Evil One who works for our destruction, and positively unite ourselves with the Lord. Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God, or the petition of good things from Him in accord with His will. It is always God who comes to encounter man in prayer. Christian prayer is the personal and living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is infinitely good, with His Son Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit who dwells in their hearts.

Imitating the Lord Jesus, in **fasting** we learn to trust the Father's saving plan for each of us (cf. Matt. 4:1-4). The practice of fasting makes us ready for nourishment of the food of the Word of God (cf. Matt. 4:4) and of fulfilment of

the Father's will (cf. Jn. 4:34). Fasting is closely connected to prayer; it strengthens virtue, inspires mercy, implores divine assistance and leads to conversion of the heart.

Giving alms, Jesus teaches, means making the needs of others our own, especially the needy of our world. They are all around us: orphaned children and the old, the sick and the suffering, families and needy individuals, next-door neighbours and people in distant lands. Whatever we give should be something of ourselves, something that costs us. We will receive blessings from God in return.

Fasting and almsgiving purify our inner selves, divesting it from many of our undue attachment to this world, to our passions and to wealth.

During this Lent, - through prayer, fasting, works of charity, attending Holy Mass and frequent reception of sacraments – let us allow the Holy Spirit to heal us, so that one day we may receive the crown of glory that awaits us. For us Catholics, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fasting and abstinence; besides, all the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence. Let us be faithful to these laws of the Church.

II. OUR JOURNEY THROUGH THE FIVE WEEKS OF LENT

The second Preface for the Lent of the Roman Missal maps out our journey in the five weeks of Lent.

*“Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give You thanks.*

*This great season of grace is Your gift to Your family to renew us in spirit.
You give us strength to purify our hearts,
to control our desires,
and so to serve You in freedom.*

*You teach us how to live in this passing world,
with our heart set on the world that will never end.” (The 2nd Preface for Lent)*

In this preface, we get an overview of the journey and the stages of the process of formation suggested: the goal of Lent is renewal of spirit; the two “tasks” of Lent are of purifying our hearts and controlling our desires; the resulting product is service in freedom; and the horizon of Lent is our life and mission in this world.

The two tasks: “... to purify our hearts, to control our desires”

Saint Paul compares Christian life to a struggle; a battle, a warfare engaged against spiritual forces who seek its destruction. The aim of Christian life is to seek always the will of God, and to live accordingly out of loving submission to Him, resisting the temptation to live according to our perverted will. But this means to enter into the arena, and stand courageously against the attacks of the evil forces. Saint Paul teaches: “Finally, grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power. Put on the full armour of God so as to be able to resist the devil’s tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens. Take up all God’s armour, then, so you will be able to stand your ground when the evil times come; and be found still on your feet, when all the task is over” (Eph. 6:10-13).

St. Peter too comes on quite strongly in stressing the need for vigilance against the attacks of the enemy: “Be sober and watch well; the devil, who is your enemy, goes about roaring like a lion, to find his prey, but you, grounded in the faith, must face him boldly” (1 Pt. 5:8).

The masters of Christian asceticism have drawn up the list of the eight capital temptations or sins, the roots of all sin and slavery. The first thing that enslaves us and takes us away from our loving Father is the desire for some physical good: concupiscence for food or sex (gluttony and lust). The Chosen People in Egypt were faced with the great vices of lust and gluttony. They committed the sins of fornication, adultery, drunkenness and gluttony.

As we move away from the bodily attachments to those of the psyche, we enter into the interior battle field of jealousy (envy), anger, greed, sadness and *acedia* (spiritual sloth) which is to relinquish discipline in the spiritual life, to give up the vigilance once maintained. Finally, pride (presumptuousness, ambition and vanity) attack the spirit and drive out God's Spirit in our refusal to yield humbly and in truth to His guidance. We strike out in complete autonomy as though we were our own end and centre of reality.

Lent is the season of grace when God - through our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving - shall give us the grace to "purify our hearts and control our desires" from all that is unbecoming for a Christian. As we cooperate with the grace of the season Lent through faithfulness to the Lenten practices, God Himself through the Holy Spirit purges away from our souls all those hidden sins and attachments, and purifies the soul in such a way that it is made capable of the vision of God.

"...and so to serve You in freedom..."

To serve God in freedom: This is the end goal, so to speak, of the renewal of Lent, the process of the purification of the heart and the reorientation of desires, to serve God and others with greater freedom, i.e., with greater magnanimity and greater love. This is the central grace of Lent, that we live our lives in greater service and greater love - as great as the love and service of the Cross and Resurrection.

St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians had insisted on the central reality of Christian freedom. "You were called to freedom." Yet, he understands quite well that freedom is a complicated reality. Hence, he distinguishes true freedom from licentiousness immediately after the call to safeguard their freedom: "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (Gal. 5:13) That is, freedom is not realised by following our bodily passions.

Paradoxically, freedom is realized in service: We are free if we become one another's servants. Human freedom is, on one hand, to be in the joy and great realm of the love of God, but it also implies being interiorly free to lay down one's life for the other. It is freedom from selfishness to freedom to serve.

“... to live in this passing world, with our heart set on the world that will never end.”

How do we live life in this world and yet have as our horizon “the world that will never end?” This is a question all of us struggle with or, at the very least, ask.

The Saints are the best placed to answer this question. During this lent find time to read the lives of the saints including our African saints such the Martyrs of Uganda, Saint Bakhita, Blessed Marie-Clémentine Anuarite, Blessed Bakanja, Blessed Irene Stefani “Nyaatha” and others. Their lives of service in this world and their commitment to God reveal to us, how to live in this passing world, with our hearts set on the world to come.

As we see in the lives of the saints, to “set our hearts on the world to come” doesn't mean we shun this world that we live in. On the contrary, this is to inspire us to live our life in this world that will bring us and others closer to heaven. It is to learn to take every decision that we make from the light of the eternity of God that we long to enter into. St. Paul writes, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).

III. CAMPAIGN AGAINST CORRUPTION

The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops initiated a campaign against corruption, launched on October 4, 2019. Among us the Bishops of Kenya, there was a general feeling that the Church needed to decisively confront this scourge that has bedevilled our country for long.

We made this public commitment to root out corruption from our country, personally and as shepherds of the Catholic Church; we called on

everyone who believes in God to take this decision for the sake of our society and our children. We acknowledged that our struggle is similar to that of David in his fight against the giant Goliath; but we believe that with God's help we can truly slay this monster of corruption and return our country from the slavery and chains of corruption.

Dear Christ's faithful, kindly join us in this task through prayer, fasting and your life of generosity and service. St Paul cautioned us that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (cf. 1 Timothy 6: 10). At the root of corruption is the ugly vice of greed (also known as avarice) that has permeated all sectors of society, including believers. As you know, one of the movements of the flesh that we need to crucify and put to death is greed, the inordinate desire to possess material things.

All that we own, even if we worked for it, ultimately is a gift from God our creator. He is the author of all the good that exists. The Church teaches that these gifts are never given simply to enrich the individual who receives them; instead they are given, in trust, for the benefit of the entire community. Avarice is a denial of this truth, and the more it is embraced, the greater a threat it poses to an individual's spiritual life.

St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out several moral dangers posed by avarice. For instance, avarice might suggest the use of force or violence to secure the desired good. But even if it does not lead individuals to inflict physical harm to achieve their ends, avarice can undermine the relations that ought to govern our human relations.

When avarice leads one to embrace falsehood in the desire to gain (or protect) material goods, St. Thomas says we encounter the sin of fraud. Lying perverts the value of human speech, and perjury – lying under oath – increases the gravity of the sin. When desire for gain leads one to betray another person, we have succumbed to treachery – the moral consequence of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. (cf. *ST*, II-II, 118.8).

In this context, it is opportune to recall Pope Francis' plea asking for a change of heart among all of us. "Do not fall into the terrible trap of thinking that life depends on money and that, in comparison with money, anything else is devoid of value or dignity. This is nothing but an illusion! We cannot take money with us into the life beyond. Money does not bring us happiness. Violence inflicted for the sake of amassing riches soaked in blood makes one neither powerful nor immortal." (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 19). We should often recall the truth that what we will take back to God on our last day are the things of the spirit, our very souls and nothing else. There will be no more money to earn, no more goods to accumulate, and we will be judged by the weight, not of our wealth, but on the state of our soul persevering in charity, that is, on how far we succeeded or failed in loving God and our neighbour.

IV. STEWARDSHIP FOR A TRANSFORMED NATION ... MY OBLIGATION

This year's Lenten Campaign, whose theme is *Stewardship for a Transformed Nation... 'My obligation'*, should give us cues and help us to address how we can continue this fight against corruption.

When well understood, stewardship can spur the country to greater heights. In stewardship, we believe that everything God created is good. Man was created in the image and likeness of God and was commanded to govern creation rationally to bring forth fruit from the earth. The mandate given to man was to rule the earth (cf. Gen. 1:26), to name creation (cf. Gen. 2:15-20) and to worship God through sacrifices (cf. Gen. 2:3).

The baptised have a special responsibility to share the kingly, prophetic and priestly life of Christ through responsible stewardship of this creation. In other words, our stewardship must imitate that of Christ. Everything we have and are belong to God. We are simply managers or administrators acting on His behalf.

Stewardship is the commitment of one's self and possessions to God's service. One day each one of us will be called to give an account of how we have managed what the Master gave us. The reward is to share the Master's happiness here on earth and the life to come (cf. Matt. 25:21). This requires that we are faithful, responsible and accountable stewards as illustrated in Psalms 8:3-8: "When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet. All of them, sheep and cattle, yes, even the savage beasts - birds of the air, and fish that make their way through the waters."

Consequently, if we exercise our dominion in a way that ultimately destroys nature's creative potential or denies the human family the fruits of creation, such action constitutes an offence against God's original plan for creation.

The Lenten Campaign 2020 calls us to examine how we have exercised this gift of stewardship from God. It should be a period of deep soul-searching and of conversion.

In Week One of the Lenten Reflection, we are invited to reflect on **Responsible and Sustainable Farming**. As good stewards, we should strive to preserve our common home, the earth. All should be encouraged to engage in some sort of farming or gardening. To cultivate the earth and to produce things for our sustenance is a noble task. Farming brings us closer to nature and hence to the first work of God. It can soothe our spirit. Here too we must avoid the temptation to get rich quickly through very selfish and dangerous means. The document on the Lenten Campaign states, "We have seen many people adding illegal chemical to fruits, vegetables and even fertilizers. This has contributed to the rise in the number of cancer patients. We are being called to be responsible because one day we shall have to answer before God."

Youth and Development is the topic of Week Two and asks us how we might contribute to the empowerment of the youth. “They need safe spaces where they can come together and engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision-making and freely express themselves. These include civic spaces to enable them to engage in governance issues and public spaces to afford them opportunity to participate in sports and other leisure activities. Responsible use of digital spaces helps youth to have meaningful interaction virtually across borders” (*Lenten Campaign* 2020). Clearly we will have to see how to create time and space for our young people.

In Week Three, we shall discuss how we have handled the **Natural Resources** and what we can do to improve our use of them. As Pope Francis affirmed in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, the earth is ‘Our Common Home’. The Lenten Campaign asks us to reflect on how we have been involved in resource utilisation, e.g. water and anything else we are entrusted with. Do I exploit the natural resources at the detriment of common good? Am I a cause of environmental pollution, degradation, poverty, diseases and even death because of the way I manage the natural resources? These are very important questions for our self-examination.

In Week Four, we discuss **Leadership and Accountability**. The Lenten Campaign Booklet recognises some of the challenges that the country is currently facing since the devolution: “Corruption at the counties, misuse and wastage of public resources, political patronage, nepotism and clannism, impunity and lack of accountability. Weak governance, lack of public participation, poor institutional framework, poor prioritisation of projects and weak oversight by county assemblies have undermined development in counties.” The remedy is for the leaders to recognise that first and foremost, they are accountable to God and then to the people they serve. Good stewards must practice servant leadership. It is not what I get that matters but the service I give.

Lastly, in Week Five, we shall discuss the **Sanctity of Life and Human Dignity**. The text repeats the teachings of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It might be opportune to recall it here once again: “*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being” (CCC, n. 2258). Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. We must respect the dignity of life from conception to its natural end. To protect life, we must appeal to our consciences and always act ethically. We must reject the culture of death, especially introducing children to practices that are not life-giving.

Ultimately, education on good stewardship will take place in the family. The family is the cradle of human civilisation and the domestic Church. Hence we must oppose all those institutions and persons seeking to destroy the family, even when we are seen to be not “politically correct”. We must reject the ‘gender ideology’ and the introduction of ‘comprehensive sexual education’ which in reality is aimed at destroying the family and consequently the society. As good stewards, we should be guided by God’s word and the Church’s teaching.

V. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OUR PROTECTIVE MOTHER

Clearly we have a huge battle ahead – the battle for our soul, the battle against corruption in our country and the battle against the destruction and degradation of the environment and the earth, our common home. Here our heavenly mother, who crushed the proud head of the ‘serpent’, can be of assistance to us by protecting us from evil. The Blessed Virgin is known to be a protective mother. There are several feasts of Mary based on times when she was called upon for protection in military circumstances. We recall the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary on October 7th, honoring Mary and the Rosary

started in thanksgiving for victory at the Battle of Lepanto between the Holy League and the Ottoman Turks. The feast of the Holy Name of Mary (September 12) became tied to the victory of the Christian forces over the Turks in the Battle of Vienna in 1683 under the leadership of the Polish King Jan III Sobiesk. The feast of Our Lady Help of Christians (May 24th), though uses an older title of Mary, dating to at least the 16th century, in it we recall the day when Pope Pius VII was released from the captivity of the forces of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1814 through Mary's intercession.

We can and should assist our Blessed Mother in our battles of our time, through the recitation of the Holy Rosary. That's what she asked us to do when she appeared at Fatima a little more than a century ago. Let us then make it a point to recite many rosaries, individually, as families and in your ecclesial groups for victory over evil, sin and death.

VI. A GRACEFUL LENTEN SEASON AND A JOYFUL EASTER

My dear Christians, I urge you therefore to fight this victorious battle against evil, to take seriously the Lenten observances of prayer, fasting and works of mercy. Do not forget to prefer some spiritual works, like attending the Stations of the Cross, hearing Mass (if possible daily), making a weekly holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, taking time for personal prayer and spiritual reading and most especially making a good confession and receiving sacramental absolution. Although these practices may have evolved over the centuries, the focus remains the same: to repent of sin, to renew our faith and to prepare to celebrate joyfully the mysteries of our salvation.

As I conclude, I wish to greet all the Catechumens in our various parishes who are preparing to receive the Holy Baptism on Easter night. With a father's heart, I welcome you joyfully to the Catholic Church, together with those who will be received into the Catholic Church from other Christian communities. May you always find the Church your true home and mother. As a mother, she

will nourish you with the Word and the sacraments. In return, may you love the Church as “Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her” (Eph. 5:2), and serve her children wholeheartedly in your families and parish or religious communities.

Our dear children, young people, our dear fathers, mothers, our priests, men and women religious, may you have a graceful Lenten season, and a joyful Easter.

May the blessings of the Almighty God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit come down on you and remain with you always.

Your shepherd

✠John Cardinal Njue
Archbishop of Nairobi