

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

Pastoral Letter for Advent 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Because the early Christians believed Christ was the one true God, and refused to also acknowledge Caesar as god, the Romans mistook them for traitors, people who were disloyal to the state, and subjected them to exclusion and severe persecution. That went on for 300 years. Every time Christians met they usually greeted one another with *Maranatha* in Aramaic (which means “Come, Lord Jesus!”—cf. Revelation 22:12; Luke 21:28; John; 14:1-4; Acts 1:10-11), as a sign of encouragement and a reminder. For Christians believe that the Lord of history is not just any temporal power, but Christ the King who reveals and makes present the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The Lord promised that he would come again to fulfill the Kingdom of Heaven. And so, *Maranatha* is the cry of Christians in distress who urgently seek strength and consolation. It is also their prayer as they wait in faith for the coming of the Prince of Peace.

Later at every Advent, the Church began using the word *Maranatha* as a form of mutual encouragement. The idea is to strengthen one’s conviction, to be always vigilant, and to discern the signs of the times as we journey toward the fullness of the Kingdom. As Catholics in Hong Kong this Advent, we increasingly feel the urgency of this prayer. Since mid-June, the Extradition Bill has driven many Hong Kong citizens with different stances to rally and protest on the streets.

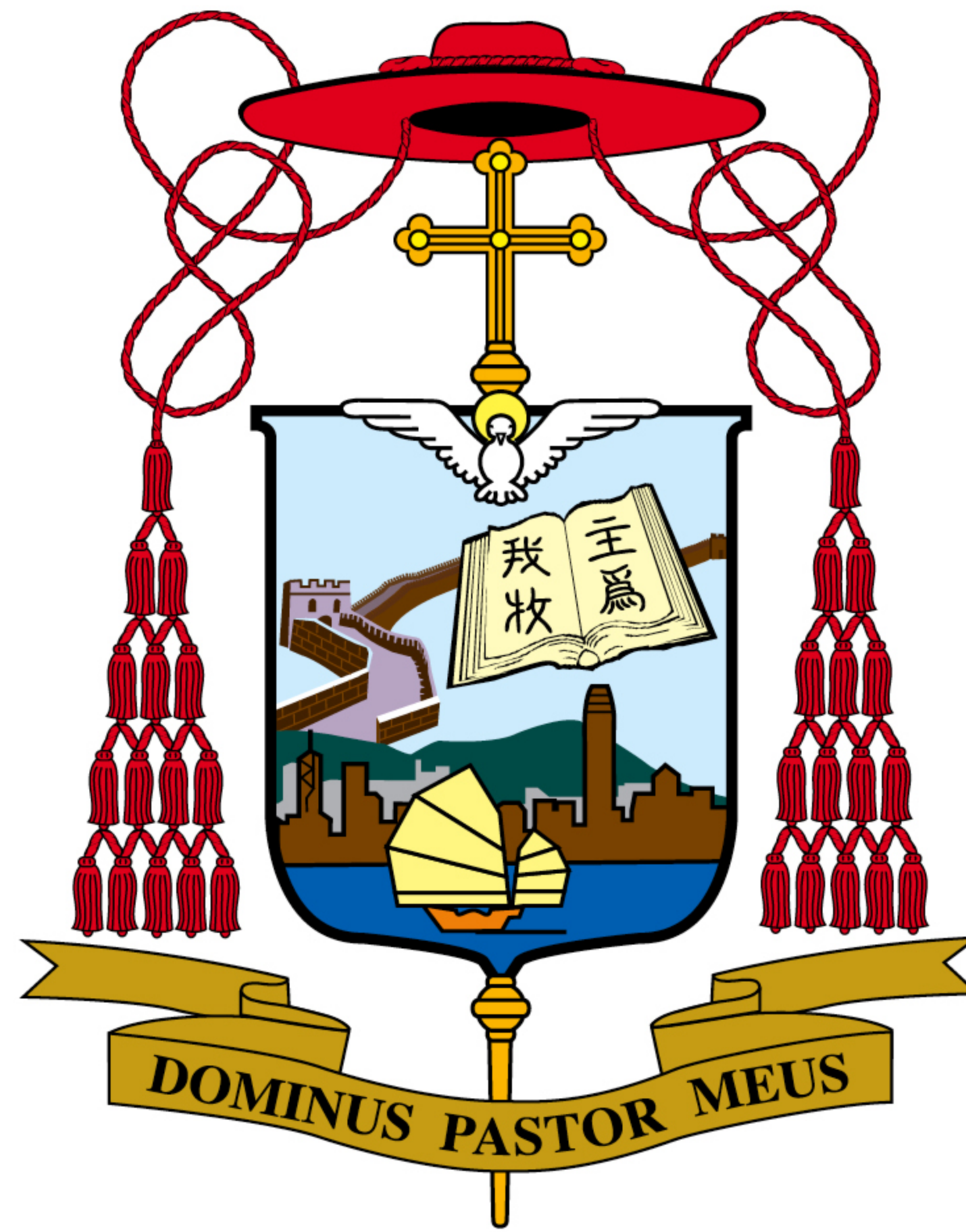
As events unfolded over the last several months, even though the proposed Extradition Bill was withdrawn, mutual suspicion, rejection and hostility between people with different political views have not been resolved. Conflicts have also arisen among family members, relatives and friends.

The Church is a microcosm of society. Many Catholics experience the social ruptures, and bear the psychological stress, anxiety and depression, or they feel anger; even their faith is shaken. How should we face the present dilemma? Let us emulate the early Christians, and cry out “*Come, Lord Jesus!* Deliver us from trials and difficulties, and bring us inner tranquillity and lasting peace.”

The experience of the early Christians tells us, when in prayer they experience the Lord’s coming. They become free and are touched by the liberation, conversion and healing, as well as consolation that the risen Christ brings. Here are three related Biblical stories for us to ponder:

Accompany and listen, rekindle hope

Chapter 24 of the Gospel according to Luke tells of two disciples who, after what seemed like the utter failure of Jesus on the cross, left Jerusalem in sorrow to face a perplexing future. They met Jesus on the road and recounted their pain and despair. Jesus listened patiently, then he said to them: ““Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?” Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them



the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.” (Luke 24:26-27) The disciples later said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

Because Jesus listened to and walked with them, and illumined by the mystery of the Passion, they recognised the risen Christ. They renewed their hope and returned to Jerusalem to tell the apostles what had happened on the road.

Accept the limitations and step out of the quandary

The parable of the prodigal son in Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, tells of a younger son who left his father’s house and squandered his money on a life of debauchery. He was reduced to feeding the pigs and he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. He finally gathered courage to go home.

When his father, who had been waiting for him, saw him return unharmed, he rushed to kiss and embrace him. But the elder son was unwilling to forgive his brother. He said to his father in resentment: “This son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property—he and his loose women—you kill the calf we had been fattening” (Luke 15:30). The father did not condone the behaviour of the younger son; but in the eyes of the father, the younger son was a child who was dead and has come to life. So he counselled his elder son: “Your brother was lost and is found. We should celebrate and rejoice.” (Luke 15:32)

The wounds remain, but embrace new life

Chapter 20 of the Gospel of John relates how the risen Jesus once appeared to his disciples. Thomas was not among them. Later, when they shared with him their encounter with the Lord, Thomas would not believe it. He had to personally verify the truth. He said: “Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe” (John 20:25). Jesus later appeared to him, and invited him to examine the wounds of his crucifixion.

Illumined by the mystery of the Resurrection, Jesus not only showed Thomas the reality of violence, but he also revealed to him how the Resurrection turns the cruelty and destruction of violence into the sacrifice and redemption of love. In the end Thomas believed that even though Jesus died, he is still alive today.

“There can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life and that all our struggles will prove worthwhile. If this is the case, we can stop complaining and look to the future, for with him this is always possible. That is the certainty we have.” (Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, 25 March 2019, section 127)

And so I proclaim in this new liturgical year, the diocese will use “Come, Lord Jesus!” as our pastoral theme. I call upon all brothers and sisters in the Church: besides fervently asking the Lord to give us consolation and strength amidst suffering, let the many communities, organisations, parishes and diocesan offices, through actual pastoral care, help each one of us to recognise the Lord Jesus who still lives among us. He will personally walk with us through our desolation in order to rekindle our hope, as we face the reality and live. He will sweep away the prejudices in our hearts, so that we can see with the eyes of the loving father and accept one another as sisters and brothers. He will also put his hand into the wounds of our hearts and spirits, and turn them into the springs of joy and forgiveness.

Let us pray for one another, and continue to pray earnestly for the well being of Hong Kong society.

+ John Card. Tong

John Cardinal Tong
Solemnity of Christ the King
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