



Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu

KAAMATAN AT THE TIME OF PANDEMIC

To all the Faithful in the Archdiocese of KK.

Writing to you during this pandemic is not nice because COVID-19 has cut me off personally from you all, especially on the occasion of Kaamatan festival. As Sabahans we have been so used to gathering and fellowshiping in the month of May, to share our joy and laughter, to celebrate our harvest through songs and dances and, above all, in the Eucharist. All these are part and parcel of our identity as a Local Church since the very essence of Church is communion.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken away these fellowships. Even our liturgies have to be celebrated privately, telecasted and watched without sacramental but spiritual communion. I can empathize with many of you for your hunger for the Bread of Life. However, as responsible citizens, we abide willingly to the MCO because it is the way to break the chain of the virus infection. It is for the common good that we stay at home while upholding the spirit of solidarity with the rest of the world. And it is for the same reason that we have decided to cancel our Archdiocesan Kaamatan celebration this year 2020.

The Kaamatan theme chosen this year is “Menghidupi keaslian budaya di dalam keluarga untuk meneruskan Misi Kristus” (Living out the purity of culture in the family to continue the Mission of Christ). The theme implies that to continue the mission of Christ the family is called to live out a culture that is not adulterated. I would like to share my reflection on this.

First of all, what is the mission of Christ? It is to save the world from the virus called sin. Sin has upset the beauty of creation where “everything is good” (ref. Gen.1). Through sin humankind rebels and chooses “to hide” (ref. Gen. 3). Sin leads man to prefer darkness over light. His dignity derived from the image and likeness of God is being distorted. We see the consequences of sin in today’s world.

If culture is defined as ‘the ideas, customs, attitudes and social behaviour of a society or a particular people’, then we can say that right from the Fall of our first parents, human culture has been adulterated by sin because humankind can no longer relate properly. Cain could not stand the goodness in his own brother Abel. All through the Old Testament, jealousy, selfishness and vengeance have ruined interpersonal relationships. Christ’s mission is to restore the wounded person and his culture to the beginning of time, where everything was once “so good”.


To continue this mission of Christ, the key word is LOVE. Only love can conquer sin and restore the purity of culture. Benedict XVI in his encyclical “Deus caritas est” (God is love) differentiates “agape” from “eros”. The former is sacrificial love while the latter is self-centred love. To move from eros to agape love, we need to first recognize and admit that the God we worship is LOVE (ref. 1 Jn. 4:7-21). It is He who first loves us even while we are in sin. If He loves us unconditionally, we in turn should love others for what and who they are, unconditionally.

As Kaamatan approaches, let us find time to examine this “purity of culture”. Do we give time to each other at home? Do we speak and listen with love? What kind of love? Do we allow media technology to replace our personal touch? Are our ideas, attitudes, customs and social behaviour at home and in society motivated by agape or eros?

No doubt, the pandemic has brought a lot of fear and suffering in the family. But many also see it as a blessing in disguise, especially in restoring the right relationship with God, with each other in the family, and with nature. While the fear of Covid-19 has given us the opportunity to stay at home, let us proactively make use of the time to purify our family culture. We do not know how long the pandemic will last but its serious impact on life will surely be felt socially and economically. However, as long as the family bond is grounded on agape love, come what may, we will have the necessary strength and support to deal with the future. If we can make this our resolution, then Kaamatan this year would have a deeper impact on our culture.

May Mother Mary intercede for your well being as well that of the front-liners who risk their own lives to care for the victims of Covid-19.

Kotobian Tadau Tagazo do Kaamatan!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Wong', enclosed within a large, stylized circular flourish.

Archbishop John Wong