



BISCHOFSBRIEF ZUR
FASTENZEIT 2024

Bishop's Letter For the 2024 Easter Lent

(To be read in all Sunday services on February 17th and 18th, 2024)

1. This Is the Time Of Fulfillment

Dear sisters and brothers, *"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."* Jesus begins his public ministry with this programmatic call – as described by the evangelist Mark (1:15) – and gets a lot of attention from the people of his time. Many expected the end of the world to come soon. However, there were different ideas about what might come. For most, it was the idea of an examination that was either awaited with satisfaction – because people thought they were on the safe side – or fear. Jesus, on the other hand – as the Gospels convey (e.g. Mt 11:5) – associates it with the promise: *"The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them."* What he announces in this way as the kingdom of God is truly "fulfilled time". It opens up a completely new horizon. What was previously not possible will become reality; what could not even be imagined will prove to be a new form of living together and will include everyone without exception.

And how do we hear this message today? Occasionally, we too are disillusioned, which has little in common with the idea of a "fulfilled time". On the one hand, we are confronted with the wounds of the world day by day. On the other hand, many also feel that the situation of the church is a burden. The number of people leaving is growing not decreasing. Some people no longer feel at home in church. Others are disappointed about how the church deals with its own transgressions. For to many people the message of the kingdom of God no longer means anything in their concrete lives.

We have been realizing that things cannot go on as before. There won't be enough people working in church in the future. Fewer and fewer people are dedicating their professional lives to engage in church. It is not only in Germany that the number of priests is decreasing. We are also seeing a similar trend in the number of permanent deacons and lay ministers (Gemeindereferentinnen und – referenten). This concerns us. Finally, our mission remains as it is formulated in the Gospel of Mark (16:15): „ *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.*“ This means, however, that we as church - meaning all believers - we carry the Good News into the world, especially in oppressive times, and allow people to experience the hope associated with it. But how will people hear it – and Paul already expressed this concern (Romans 10:14) – "*without someone to preach?*"

This is precisely why Jesus' words also apply to us today: The time is fulfilled! The "kairos", the right moment, is now. And it is up to all of us not to let it pass us by, but to catch the opportunity and follow the paths open to us.

2. The Kingdom Of God Is At Hand

This is already happening in many places in our diocese. People are actively using their skills and talents. Through their service, they are making it clear that the kingdom of God, of which Jesus proclaims, is not just a state that is still a long way off, but has already begun to dawn in our world. It can be felt where faith is alive; where people share the Gospel in word and deed; where institutions open their doors; where people volunteer for others; where parishes and communities are welcoming and exclude no one; where teachers help young people to experience that unconditional acceptance by God comes before any pressure to perform and any demands. Proclamation happens in all these places. This makes it clear how diverse it can be. The sermon plays a central role [...]. It is an important part in the common celebration of the Eucharist and other church services. We have been experiencing that a greater variety is also needed here in order to address and empower people in their different life situations. And it already exists. This includes, in particular, the service of the former diaconate helpers (Diakonatsshelfer), which is now carried on as the worship leaders (Gottesdienstbeauftragte). It already has a long tradition in our diocese. I am very grateful that so many people are willing to take on this task with great enthusiasm!

Nevertheless, we are concerned about the question of how proclamation can also take place in the future and under new conditions. The discussions at the Synodal Way (Synodalem Weg) have raised more awareness of this topic. And the World Synod of Bishops also sees this as an important priority. At the same time, the question of suitable future forms of proclamation has been a recurring theme in our diocese since the Pastoral Future Conversation (Pastorales Zukunftsgespräch) from 2001 to 2004.

3. Think Greater, And Believe In The Gospel

So, the time is truly fulfilled, and I believe that now is the right moment to get seriously involved and to turn in the spirit of Jesus. This is called "*metanoiete*" in the Greek text. This does not just mean turning away from everything that has been before, turning around and simply going in the opposite direction. Rather, it is an invitation to "*think further and greater, beyond the established.*" This courage is given to us to dare to try something new on the familiar and trusted paths. In our diocese, it is primarily priests and deacons who have carried out the ministry of preaching – as they are ordained to do. However, lay ministers (Gemeindereferentinnen und – referenten) are also empowered and entrusted with this task. Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council even assigns this task to all Christians. In baptism and confirmation, we all share in Christ's prophetic office.¹ This conviction is also embedded in our canon law² and is still reflected today³. Therefore, we all have a shared responsibility to be witnesses of the kingdom of God in the midst of our society, but also in the midst of our church. Perhaps too often people think that the responsibility for this is assigned to a few people who hold a special office. But let us think greater! We are all capable of speaking about God and our faith – in our families and circles of friends, at work and also in the liturgy. Particularly in our local church, which will be more and more characterized by voluntary work in the future, the worship leaders should be empowered to carry out the proclamation service in the liturgy with the appropriate qualifications on behalf of the church. Let us think greater of the power of the Gospel in which we believe and which we are to proclaim, you and I together.

Dear sisters and brothers, the upcoming weeks before Easter offer a good opportunity to explore this commitment and aspiration in more detail. I invite you to look more

¹ Look: LG 12.

² Look: Can 766 CIC (1983).

³ Look: Synthesebericht der Weltbischofssynode S. 20.

closely at the question of how our baptism and confirmation place us in a common responsibility. And I think that the way we answer this question will also determine the future of our diocese. Let us recognize the fullness of time, let us capture the presence of God's kingdom in our midst and, trusting in the Gospel, let us think greater about our God and what he has to say to us in this world! Talk to others about your faith and what gives you hope! Make it a topic in your councils and groups too! I hope that even more women and men, young and old, will take up the ministry of proclamation in word and deed in our church and be able to bring the message of Jesus Christ to many in a credible and convincing way.

I invoke the blessing of the almighty and merciful God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit on us all.

Magdeburg, on the 1st Sunday of Lent 2024

Your bishop + Gerhard Feige

To deepen the topic "Proclamation of the Gospel by all the baptized" during Lent, materials are available at:

www.fastenhirtenbrief2024.fagp.eu