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PRESSESTELLE UND
ÖFFENTLICHKEITSARBEIT

Archbishop Dr. Heiner Koch Lenten Letter 2020

blocking period: 29. Februar 2020

To be read in every worship on 1st march 2020.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“Beyond measure!” - Many people feel exposed to an enormous strain of demanding expectation, in their job, in their social relations and in their family. Pressure everywhere, the whole day long. Always more is wanted.

“That’s enough now!” - This cry of protest we hear nowadays often and in many contexts, voiced against events in society, in one’s own family, in politics, at the job against work mates, and also against the Church. The cry expresses pain, despair, disappointment and suffering. It is all too much, “beyond measure”, unbearable. People feel left out, powerless, not understood. They become furious, and also their fury knows no measure, their language and the harshness of their critique reveal how exceeding demands lead to excessive disappointment and anger.

“Beyond measure!” - Some people lose all sense of measure in their desire to advance their career, in their thirst for recognition and acknowledgment, in their hunger to consume whatever is on offer, and in a ruthless waste of God’s creation. Civility of public life being set aside, the society is split by the behaviour and ferocious speech of those who lost all sense of moderation.

“Beyond measure!” - Others look for life’s fulfilment by rejecting all restraint. Here and now we live and we want to taste it all. For we live only once and our time on earth is measured and in any case short. When dead we are gone, and the end is the end. This craving to experience everything on offer so as not to miss out on anything

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gains the upperhand and becomes the rule of life. In many cases this poverty of life's ambition produces a certain fanaticism. Out of feeling that one lacks recognition there grows the greed for acknowledgement and praise. Uncertain about guiding values and contemptuous of prevailing rules one develops an immense desire for security, to be insured for all eventualities, and it is always the others who have to provide all-round protection. The limitation of means at one's disposal stimulates the wish for riches. Possessing things becomes a priority. Many seem to have lost all sense of moderation, consume beyond measure, exploit others beyond measure. They live with a fixation on "as much as possible" in all respects, and often they remain unaware how this useless craving ruins their lives, and the lives of those they live with. Contentedness becomes impossible, lasting joy unknown. So people become victims of their misguided desires.

Where living beyond measure reigns as the overall target, there often arises the silent wish of liberating oneself from this addiction. But how to achieve that? It will be necessary first to penetrate to the core of the problem. Why this hunger to consume more and more and to indulge in ever new ways of dissipation? The root may well be a futile search for life's meaning. Perhaps it lies in a deeply felt uncertainty of what life is all about. What to do when the needle of the compass is nowhere fixed?

Therefore it is so important to orientate oneself time and again. We have to discover our location inside the framework of life. I believe reflecting critically on what one is doing in life makes sense and is extremely helpful. That is to say, we have to live more consciously and conscientiously. Thus arises a chance to restrain this ever recurring "beyond measure", in the ideas we harbour in our mind, in our discourse when we speak, and actively in practice and all our behaviour.

We all know, in this world every human person lives only for a limited time, and with limited possibilities; nobody's potential is free from restrictions. It is therefore, I think, of the utmost importance that we make ourselves aware of our possibilities, realistically, and that everyone decides how he and she intends to shape his or her life-span, to set priorities, in what to invest my time, more for this, less for that. We have to find our own measure, in accordance with our goals.

However, someone may decide better not to decide at all, rather wishing to live keeping things pending, to taste all and to miss nothing. Such a person will quickly experience how unfortunate that option is, how he or she will be driven from outside, by other people or by dominating fashionable tendencies. Consciously adhering to one's own decision is the art of life. I have to remain concentrated on what I regard as important, sensible and meaningful. Thus I find my place, and more clearly than before I can make my contribution to the world around me. Then, less can be more. The permanent task of every human life is dealing with the given time and potential in a

conscious way, focused on and faithful to the choices made. That is the measure that fills us with more than any “beyond measure” will ever do.

In the gospel of the first Sunday of Lent (Mt 4:1-11) we meet Jesus setting standards by taking his stand when the devil tries to tempt him to an unrestrained life. Satan *showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence* and makes this offer: “*All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me*”. But for Jesus, God and no one else is and remains the decisive point of his compass. He rejects the offer of the Tempter because Jesus knows that God provides fullness of living which one cannot replace with riches of any kind, neither fame nor power. Who of us would resist, if the entire world were put at his feet? Who would resist when given the promise you will be able to change everything according to your will, even turn stones into bread? Who would not wish to pass through life without meeting any obstacle that could reduce infinite hopes to limited possibilities? Who would resist as Jesus did in front of a promise to become overwhelmingly great in this world, a star admired by everyone?

For Jesus it suffices to know that his God and Father is behind him, over him and in him. Someone who believes to be carried by God and thus lives in community with Him, has no need to satisfy his or her longing with the mediocrity of this world, which in the end cannot fill the yearning of the human heart. That is the message Jesus sends us from the desert. As Christians we are convinced that the love of God exceeds all human measurement. Truly “beyond measure” we are supported, carried and enabled by this divine love. For this reason we ought to be capable to wave aside so many temptations that promise much but fail to deliver the desired fulfilment of life.

Moreover let us not overlook, lack of restraint quickly creates injustice. It is an open door to use other people, exploiting them. The immoderate person pays no attention to others, while someone conscious of his or her position in life, with all its limits, will remain attentive, always respectful, aware of how God cares for everyone. The thought of the cross of Christ provides a sure orientation, pointing forward to his glorious resurrection, the entry into a fullness of life “beyond measure”.

A reliable compass – our experience teaches us – is of immeasurable value to steer a course towards a balanced life, healthy and energetic, amidst the constant demands life makes, between movement and rest, involvement in community life and withdrawal into privacy, between work and leisure, between pleasure and discipline. We need a safe balance between these and other tensions of our lives. Moderation is good always.

“Good order comes with right measure. Too much as well as too little puts disease in place of health.” This is a statement of the well known priest and medical doctor Sebastian Kneipp. In the Old Testamen, in

the book of Jesus Sirach, it is said: "*Keep measure in all things. Do not be overbearing towards anyone, and do nothing unjust.*" This rule applies to the individual as well as to social communities, it saves our life from drowning in mediocrity or excesses.

I ask almighty God to bless you on all your ways and especially through the weeks ahead of us, so that during Lent we may all come closer to a well measured life, in preparation for Easter, the great feast of eternal life "beyond measure".

Yours

Dr. Heiner Koch