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Pastoral letter for Lent 2026

Title: “You need only think of yourself a little” is not enough for my life.

This Christmas, millions of Christians all around the world greeted their saviour and celebrated his birthday. During Lent, they and many of us expect salvation through the cross and hope for his resurrection. Christianity is a religion of salvation - salvation is its core theme – one that seems to be inaccessible, even for people within the church. Even the term “salvation” and the implied concept can be challenging and seems abstract and untrustworthy at first. It is worthwhile to rediscover this subject both for oneself and as an aspect of church life. There may be entire libraries written about it, but books alone rarely help the searching individual to move forward.

I want to point out a few things to reflect on. 1996 saw the release of a short film entitled “Ernst and the light.” Even though the film is 30 years old, the message remains relevant. The story is told quickly: Ernst is a representative of a cleaning company driving to his home, on his way he picks up a hitchhiker. The hitchhiker claims to be Jesus, son of God. The two enter conversation. Jesus tries to win Ernst over for his mission to save humanity in clumsy and antiquated ways. However, Ernst is interested in anything other than what Jesus has to offer. His phone is broken, and he wants to get home to his wife, which he makes very clear to Jesus: “You do not need to save anyone, you just need to think of yourself a little”. The whole “missionary slop” continues to get on his nerves. Jesus has very clearly failed in the recruitment due to his language and themes. He is unaware of what happens on Earth. Ernst shows him real life. Jesus cannot win anyone over with his current message.

If Ernst mirrors today’s reality, has the Christian message reached its end? I don’t believe so and I want to argue against the cleaning company representative Ernst. Because the core of the Christian salvation message to me is being freed from the tendency to only think of oneself.

1. I want to be redeemed from any form of egotism

The Christian teaching of salvation expands the perspective from “me” alone to the responsibilities we owe to the world, and the many relationships in which people live. Anyone who notices that their own opinion is not enough, will want to expand their view. Here, I want to relay my personal impression: for many people the “I” has become the end measure. The opinion of others is commonly viewed as a threat. The word of God and his requests no longer play a role for many people. To me, the first aspect of my hope and salvation is that my own horizons are being broadened. As a church worldwide, we are searching for synodality. This word perfectly describes these concerns. Christians will, in their following of Jesus, be constantly challenged by trying not to foreground their own worldview and opinions. In the sense of Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, it must always be about “saving” the point of view of other people. To expand one’s own horizons, to move from I to you, was Jesus’ life program. Self-realisation at the cost of others was not what life was to him. His goal was to heal others and allow them to grow above themselves. Angels announced peace at his birth, people recognised in him hope for the future of all humans. The cross is the summary of his attitude to life. He lays down his life for all humans. In the epistle to the Phillipians (2,5-9), the apostate Paulus summarises this core tenant:

“In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus: His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names.”

The opening up beyond one’s own self also recognises the will of God. Anyone who searches for His will, is committed to trying to support other people. All forms of egoism, contempt for humanity, and hate are foreign to the will of God. Some people refer to Christian values and traditions and simultaneously hold contempt towards others and their values. We must be saved from this disposition.

2. I want to be redeemed from my faults

Perhaps this is the point that people think about the least. Personally, I can say: I fall short of God's expectations of me. Despite my best efforts, I have wronged other people, as well as God. Trying to force out his topic does not help. People wrong others, by ignoring the good, by sinning in thoughts, words and actions. I cannot forgive myself for this. Ignoring it helps just as little. When people are aware of the fact that nobody is perfect, it changes the way they engage with each other. A substantial part of my Christian faith is that my boundaries, my failures and my faults, should not be pushed aside, but that I should seek forgiveness from God. Christ carried all sins and turned them into life. Part of the practice of my faith is the confession, but all other forms of self-reflection and evaluation change me and create new possibilities for life and community

3. I want to be redeemed from my finiteness

An important part of my faith is that I understand myself as an entirely unique creation. God called me by my name. Hope for me is that God trusts me to change the world for the better. I am not a victim of blind fate or evil. The actual core of my hope, however, is that I know I will be called to eternal life. I was written in God's hand; I will never be forgotten by God. I do not hold this hope just to myself, but for all people. Part of this hope is also the hope for lasting justice. I strongly hope that the victims of history will experience justice. I strongly believe that I am called to a life that goes above all human imagination. In this lies also the hope of Easter, that we will celebrate in our services. "You need only think of yourself a little" isn't enough for my life. I want to be freed from this narrow-mindedness and overcome my egotism. I want to put my faults into God's loving hands, as well as my limited time. I hope for an eternal life. In this sense I wish you all a blessed Lent.



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