



5 February 2017

Dear Fathers, Pastoral associates and Parishioners,

I have just recently returned from a two-week vacation with Father Remi Hebert in India. Plans for this particular vacation began a couple of years ago, when Father Denis Hebert, an uncle of Father Remi's, was still a missionary priest in Nicaragua. Unfortunately, his uncle developed cancer and died. We decided then to visit India, home to many priests who serve in our archdiocese, as well as many faithful parishioners.

Our experience of India was very enlightening. We were treated to first-class hospitality by all those who hosted us. We stayed for the most part with Redemptorists in Bangalore, Kerala and Mumbai, but also with the archbishops of Delhi and Chennai. We were treated to local cuisine and experienced the Catholic Church in a nation that is largely non-Christian but is so populous that even the small percentage of Catholics is still a large number of people. We toured the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Red Fort in Delhi as well as the monuments to Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders. We celebrated Mass on the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle, and visited his shrines in both Chennai and Kerala. We celebrated Mass in a number of churches, and I even shared in the Sacrament of Confirmation in a local parish.

India is a nation made up of many different cultures, languages and religions. Whenever I was asked to "say a few words" at a celebration, my message was the same: in the world as in the Church, we are many different peoples, each with our own language and culture and traditions. Despite this variety, we are also one because of our common humanity and our common faith in Jesus Christ. Some secular rulers consider it a weakness to be different in our expressions, and so they try to make their nation homogeneous. True unity arises from our belief in one God and the mutual respect and esteem that arise from our faith.

Pluralism of Canadian Society and a Faith Response

Every Canadian has been touched by the recent killing of Muslims at prayer at the Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec. Such an event brings home some realities:

1. That our country is not made up of one religion, but many;
2. That peaceful coexistence calls for acceptance of others who are not "like us";
3. That persons of faith choose to act from a position of universal charity, and not from fear.

When tragedies such as this happen, either close to home or across the globe, each of us is challenged to respond to the event in some way. This may be done as individual citizens, or as members of a community such as a neighbourhood or a town. Since the attack last Sunday evening, we have seen many communities rise up to express their horror at what has occurred, and to commit themselves to a respectful and inclusive society. The very prayers that we offer in the Prayers of the Faithful at Sunday Mass speak of our request of God to give us a spirit of acceptance and mutual respect.

Lent and my Next Letter. Ash Wednesday.

March 1st is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Season of Lent. Because my letter for March will come out too late to speak to this day and season, let me say a few things here and now about this day.

Lent is a time when we are called upon to reflect on our life in relation to the central event of Christ's life and ministry: his death and resurrection. Conversion is a strong appeal from the prophets and from the Lord himself. While Christ was tempted in the desert after his baptism, he remained focused on the will of his Father.

"Turn away from sin, and believe the good news" is one of the formulas recommended for the imposition of ashes. In the Old Testament, kings and their people sat in sackcloth and ashes as a sign of sorrow for sins and transgressions, as well as a renewed commitment to the will of God for justice, peace and integrity.

One practice that we have promoted in the past few years is a special collection in our churches on Ash Wednesday, for the benefit of our northern missions. Please see the posters in your parish church for details about this year's collection.

Rite of Election

Every year, on the 1st Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the Rite of Election as an archdiocesan Church. This year this falls on Sunday 5 March. The Mass begins at 1:00 pm in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in McLennan. I ask that all parishes that have candidates who will be baptized or received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil (or at other times in the Easter Season) make an effort to participate in this Mass. Please contact Sister Louise Vanderploeg in the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis at 780.624.9211 or sidlfc@telus.net.

Parish Pastoral Council Discussion: Building Maintenance

For a variety of reasons, many of our parishes do not have a Parish Finance Committee or a Buildings & Maintenance Committee, apart from the Parish Council. This poses some difficulties, because the truly "pastoral" needs in a Church community are very different than the finances or "bricks and mortar" issues of maintaining buildings.

If your parish has only one Council that deals with all matters, I would ask you to reconsider this by forming a distinct Finance and Maintenance committee. These two committees should have different members, as well as their own separate constitutions (which are to be approved by the archbishop).

A parish finance or buildings committee might have as its mandate the following matters:

- The overall state of the parish buildings (church, hall and rectory).
- A schedule of maintenance, such as the changing of filters.
- Allowance in the parish budget each year for repairs and maintenance.
- A corps of volunteers who clean the church and other parish buildings.
- A policy and protocol for the rental of the church hall
- A protocol for checking buildings that are not in constant use. No building should be left unattended for more than three days.



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