



1 March 2019

Dear Pastors, Pastoral Assistants and Parishioners,

I begin to write this letter from the assembly of western bishops' meeting in Victoria. This is an annual gathering of all the Catholic bishops in western Canada, both Latin and Ukrainian Rite. At this, we not only share prayer and receive some messages of spiritual value, we also take on the issues that are common to all of us in western Canada.

Just to give you an idea of the sorts of things that concern bishops, the following are some of the issues we are talking about this week:

- Catechetics in north-western dioceses; the Western Conference of Catholic Religious Educators; the national catechetical conference coming up in April in Ottawa
- Financial management, accountability and transparency in our dioceses
- Insurance -- most western dioceses, including Grouard-McLennan, take part in a self-insurance plan
- Catholic Missions in Canada, and a national annual day of prayer
- Protecting minors from sexual abuse – an issue that calls for actions on the part of dioceses to protect our young and society as a whole from such devastating harms.
- Development and Peace, in light of the fidelity of D&P's international partners to the social and moral teachings of the Church.
- Aboriginal issues, especially around healing and culture, and the enculturation of prayer and liturgy.

### **Munus Docendi: God.**

In the Catholic Church's understanding, the bishop's role is comprised of three mandates. To sanctify. To teach. And to govern. These correspond to the three titles given to Jesus Christ: priest, prophet and king. The mandate to teach is known by its Latin term, *munus docendi*.

I will try from now on in these letters to address some teaching of the Catholic Church under this heading. *Munus docendi*.

I want to begin by speaking about God. Only recently I was on a train going to Toronto and struck up a conversation with a young man, who quickly picked up that I am "a priest, or something." Years ago, I would have assumed that most people believe in God, a Supreme Being and creator of all else that exists. As we began to speak about faith, he confessed that he's an agnostic. He respects the role of faith in helping people live an honest and virtuous life. But he also admitted his deep skepticism about the existence of God as such. In this, he is among a growing number of Canadians who self-identify as non-believers, or at least as not affiliated with any faith tradition (there is a real distinction here).

As Christians, Catholics believe not just in God, but we believe in only one God (as do the other monotheistic religions of Judaism and Islam), and that this one God is a Triune God, who has revealed himself as three “persons”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Immediately, we are confronted here with mystery. I often speak about mystery in my homilies, because “mystery” is very real in faith and in life. Mystery refers to truths held by our faith, which are not known or understood by reason alone. The Trinity is one of many mysteries in the Christian and Catholic faith.

There is much about life that is mystery. St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) wrote a great deal about faith seeking understanding. Do I believe things because I know and understand them, or do I know them because I believe them? In the classic human questioning of our existence, we often wonder if there is a meaning to life... why am I here? Is there an existential reason why I was born in this era, in this country, to this family? These are all mysteries to us, which are tackled in different ways and at different times of life.

Is there a God? Philosophy has established the logic of an “unmoved mover”, an uncreated Creator, who has existed from eternity and will exist into eternity. In the Christian experience and Scriptures, this one eternal God was made manifest as Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. While God remains a mystery, we believe in the truth of God. This is the beginning of all faith. And so every Christian Creed begins, “I/we believe in one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord ... I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.”

### **Travis Chabot.**

For many years now, Travis Chabot has been in the seminary as he discerned God’s call for him to be a priest. Over the past several months, Travis has come to the belief that God is not calling him to priesthood. He has left the seminary program, which for this academic year was his pastoral internship at High Level, Paddle Prairie and Meander River. Travis still feels God is at work in his life, but the precise details of this need to be better understood. I ask that we all keep him in your prayers.

### **The Holy Season of Lent**

Wednesday March 6<sup>th</sup> is Ash Wednesday. This begins the 40 days of the Lenten season, leading up to Easter. We are reminded each Lent of the three acts of atonement in Judaism: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

I have rediscovered in my own life the value of fasting. While we may choose to fast from many things, I encourage you to fast in the traditional sense, from food. There are great spiritual benefits to be gained from such a discipline. Try eating less this Lent, or avoiding certain foods altogether. You should feel the benefit in your spiritual life.



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