



1 March 2020

Dear Pastors, Pastoral Agents and Parishioners,

I can't believe that Lent is already here. As I write this, I am anticipating the Mass for the Rite of Election at the cathedral in McLennan on Sunday, March 1st. The next month and a half we will be in Lenten mode. The sense of time that we observe in the Church is both cyclic and progressive. The Church year has clearly identified seasons and feasts which occur each and every year. But it is not only cyclic; time also progresses, as we move through time toward the anticipated second (apocalyptic) coming of Jesus Christ. We know not when that will be, but we do know that Jesus and his Holy Spirit can come to us at any and all times. With eyes of faith we perceive what the human eye cannot – the personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Girouxville Pilgrimage

As I said in my letter of 1 September 2019, I have decided to make the shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes in Girouxville the official Marian shrine for the archdiocese. By the same token, the annual pilgrimage to this shrine for the Solemnity of the Assumption (August 15th) will be an archdiocesan event. Over the past several months, we have been working on these plans. We now have a pilgrimage planning committee, which has met a few times over the past couple of months. We have decided that, in order to make the pilgrimage accessible for the greatest number of our people, it will be held not necessarily on the date of August 15th, but on the closest weekend to that date. It so happens that in this year 2020, August 15th is on a Saturday.

It is my hope that this pilgrimage will indeed grow to become a significant annual event in our archdiocese. The first year or so there may be some hiccups which will need to be addressed and corrected; this should not be a problem.

This being said, I ask all of the faithful in our diocese to mark this pilgrimage on your calendar: Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, Girouxville. From the early evening of Friday 14 August to the evening of Saturday 15 August. You're also welcome, if you wish, to extend your stay to join in the parish Sunday Mass on Sunday 16 August at 11:00 a.m.

Watch for more details about this pilgrimage event as these become available.

Coronavirus

There is understandably great fear around the world concerning what is now being called COVID-19, the coronavirus that is spreading to many parts of the world. This is an alarming situation, which threatens many aspects of human life on the planet. Many of the world's resources are already being directed to the containment of this disease, with the hope in time of overcoming it completely.

In parts of the world that have been hardest hit, stringent measures have been put in place to prevent the spread of this virus. Sports competitions and other large events have been cancelled or postponed. Some bishops' conferences (such as the Philippines) have recommended not receiving Communion on the hand, not touching one another at the sign of peace, and frequently emptying holy water fonts.

10301-102nd Street, Grande Prairie AB T8V 2W2

Phone 780.532.9766

Fax 780.532.9706

Email archbishop.agm@live.ca

Given that there has not yet been one case of COVID-19 reported in Alberta, I am not inclined at this time to change our practices at liturgy. I encourage the obvious: frequently washing or sanitizing your hands, not touching your face without cleaning your hands, and avoiding close encounters with those who have cold symptoms. These are measures that we might always observe during cold and flu season.

If there is need for me to recommend more stringent measures in the coming weeks, I will communicate this through your parish priests.

Jean Vanier

I was genuinely dismayed by the recent news of Jean Vanier's treatment of six women in his life. On the face of it, Jean's behaviour is sinful. Over the span of several years, decades ago, he is accused of maintaining relationships with these women, acting in ways that did not respect the boundaries of a spiritual director with a spiritual directee. Of course, having died in May 2019, Jean Vanier is not around to give his side of events. Not that it's always needful to do this.

My personal reaction to this news is disbelief. I had met Jean Vanier on a few occasions, years ago in Montreal. I've read many of his books and visited L'Arche communities. When I was pastor in Grande Prairie, I entertained the thought that such a community would be well placed in my parish. I looked up to him as a very dedicated Christian and Catholic, whose accomplishments would guarantee that he would leave this world better than he found it.

Having pondered this over the past week, a few impressions remain with me:

- Such reported actions are always sinful. I cannot judge Jean or his accusers. The possibility that the nature of the relationships was "consensual" does not make them all right. Contemporary society seems to think that mutual consent makes all things neutral. Not so. If it's sinful, it's sinful, even if others join you in your sin.
- Jean Vanier was a human being. While many probably thought him a candidate for sainthood, I doubt that we'll see that now. As a human being, he was a sinner. The road to heaven is narrow and hard; the path to hell is wide and paved. It should not surprise me or anyone else that Jean Vanier sinned. His judge is a merciful God ... this is the only reprieve for any of us. As the saying goes, every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.
- This black mark on Jean's character does not negate the immense good that he accomplished. L'Arche communities have grown up in many countries and towns. Those who have been welcomed by and those who ministered to them all felt the blessings of their experience. Such communities are as valuable and appreciated as they ever were. Let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater.



Most Rev. Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan