



1 January 2021

Dear Parishioners and Fathers,

The Year 2020. We have come to the beginning of a new year. The name of the month "January" comes from the ancient Roman god Janus, who is depicted with two faces, back to back. The legend goes that Janus was able to look both forward and backwards. How fitting for the beginning of each new year, as we "review" the year gone by, as well as try to foresee what may transpire in the year to come. As I do this, I acknowledge many events in my own life and that of the archdiocese over the past year.

- Vacation in Vietnam, from mid to end January
- Western bishops' annual assembly in Victoria, at the end of February
- COVID19 pandemic, mid-March
- Pastoral Plan 2020-2025, written, discussed at APC meetings and adopted
- Financial Appeal, initially announced but delayed due to the pandemic
- The Glass Door Project – outreach to parishioners launched in response to the pandemic
- Archdiocesan Pilgrimage Committee formed and began planning a pilgrimage in Girouxville, but cancelled due to COVID.
- Consecration of Canada to Mary, Mother of the Church, on 1 May 2020
- GrACE events throughout the year
- Peace River flood and devastation to the town of Fort Vermilion, including our church and rectory
- Fr. Emmanuel's assignment to Youth Ministry and the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis
- Fr. Ben Nwaeje's departure from the Archdiocese, and the arrival of Fr. John Basiimwa
- CCCB plenary meeting on Zoom
- Archbishop's Dinner (live-streamed cooking show) on 6 November 2020
- Workshop in Diocese-Parish relations, in person at 3 locations then several times via Zoom
- Appointment of Fr. Bernard Akum, SVD as Episcopal Vicar for Indigenous Peoples

Looking ahead, it's difficult to predict what may be possible. Much depends on our recovery from the virus and its lasting effects on our activities. You will see from my calendar that I anticipate most meetings and gatherings taking place by Zoom into the foreseeable future. We are told that it will be several months before a significant number of Canadians are inoculated. Even when that is done, I have a sense that life will not return to our regular routines before the pandemic. We will have to wait and see what the final impact will be on everyday life in society.

Spiritual Reading. Those of you who are familiar with Cursillo will recall that one of the pillars of the spiritual life is study. We are told to read, and not to read just anything, but to read the best books we can get our hands on. At the top of the list is the Bible, of course. Those who have taken that recommendation seriously also come to realize that a good Bible commentary is also a must-have. There are many books and magazines that appear in my mailbox – evidently sent to me free of charge by those who feel that a bishop should be well-read! As I result, I’m never at a loss for reading material.

Another source of reading material is the Internet. I readily use search engines to verify certain facts that I may be unsure about, but I don’t recommend it for serious spiritual reading. I have just found that it isn’t there.

Over the past year, these are some of the books I have used for my own spiritual reading and reflection. I share these not so much to recommend these particular works, but to encourage you to keep good reading close at hand.

- Finding Christ in the Crisis: What the Pandemic Can Teach Us. Written by Father Harrison Ayre, a young priest from Victoria BC and Michael Heinlein, writer and editor at Our Sunday Visitor Press in the US. A fine appreciation of how we might approach the pandemic from a spiritual point of view.
- The Beatitudes and Woes of Jesus Christ, by Father Joseph R. Jacobson. Most of us remember Fr. Joseph, from our own archdiocese. In this book, he uses the beatitudes from Matthew’s gospels (and the beatitudes and woes from Luke’s gospel) to reflect a conversation between the reader and God.
- For the more serious reader, but you need not be a theologian, is the trilogy of books on Jesus of Nazareth by Joseph Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI needs no introduction. These are entitled The Infancy Narratives, From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, and Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection. In size, these three works go from small, to medium, to large, but all three are filled with excellent insights.
- Still Green and Growing: A Practical Spirituality for the Second Half of Life, by Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie. Archbishop Lavoie writes from a background of Indigenous ministry, as well as many of the stumbling blocks that most of us experience: grief, faith and hope, addictions, death.
- Le Saint Enseignant: Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, saint patron des éducateurs, by George Van Grieken, FSC. This biography, in French, tells of the trials and triumphs of the founder of the Brothers of Christian Schools in France in the 1600s, and his innovations in the formation of teachers for poor boys in north-eastern France.

I wish all of you God’s abundant blessings for 2021. We didn’t know a year ago how great would be our need for God’s graces in 2020. May we all feel the Lord’s courage, strength and kindness in the new year.



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