



1 February 2021

Dear Parishioners and Fathers,

Some days it feels like all we talk about is COVID. Is there nothing else that captures our interest, I ask myself? But then I stop and realize that COVID is worthy of our concern and interest, because it affects all of us so deeply. I wasn't around for the great Depression of the 1930's, or World War II. But I imagine as the world was dealing with those two events, they captured the attention of everyone for as long as they lived through the experience. Some people were more deeply affected than others, which is also true of the pandemic. It must have felt at times like the suffering would never end, which is also true of COVID. Given how the pandemic has progressed, sometimes it feels like we take one step forward, then two steps back. We may not all be sick with COVID, but we're all sick of COVID.

What are suitable antidotes for our malaise? I am often drawn to the theological virtues: faith, hope and love. Faith in God, who is the source of all life and goodness, He who is all life and holiness and beauty. Hope that focuses our attention on a life that is broader than what we experience in the here and now, that sees an eternal future as the goal of a constantly turning world. And love of God and neighbour, which finds its many expressions in actions, both large and small.

Lent. Ash Wednesday is coming up shortly. February 17th begins the holy season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation, but it is one of the two days in Canada of prescribed fast and abstinence. (The other is Good Friday.) In this instance, fasting means you consume noticeably less food on that day (one meal and two small “snacks”); abstinence means you eat no meat or meat products. All Fridays of Lent are days of Lenten observance, but the manner of this observance is left to the individual. Because of COVID restrictions, priests are instructed this Ash Wednesday not to rub ashes onto your forehead, but rather to sprinkle the ashes on the top of your head. All other COVID protocols are still in place.

Throughout Lent, all Catholics hear afresh the call to repent. We examine and correct our lives, making efforts both great and small to refocus our lives on God's Word and thereby take even small steps (*des petits pas*) in virtue. Both virtues and vices are habits. Those we call vices are behaviours and attitudes that lead us away from grace. Probably the best-known vices are those we call the “seven deadly sins”: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Their counter-balancing virtues are termed chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, gratitude and humility. The age-old practice of “giving up something for Lent” seeks to challenge and overcome the vices; a positive set of actions may move us to develop the virtues in their place.

Rite of Election. In the renewal of the sacred liturgy following the Second Vatican Council, the Church recovered the catechumenate – the process by which the non-baptized are welcomed into the Church at the Easter Vigil by receiving the three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The catechumenate happens over several months, as the candidates are not only instructed in Christian theology, but also enter fully into the “culture” of the Christian community. Until recently, we were calling this the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). We now call it the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults). There are many rituals and milestones in the catechumenate.

One ritual is the “Rite of Election”. In our archdiocese, this has been celebrated every year at the cathedral in McLennan. I call forth the candidates, ask them if it is their desire to move forward and complete their preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation, and witness the support of their sponsors. Each catechumen then signs “the Book of the Elect”. A truly beautiful ceremony! Unfortunately, due to COVID, we are not able to celebrate the Rite of Election in this way. I am asking the parish priests who have candidates in the OCIA to celebrate this ritual in their own parish, on or near the First Sunday of Lent.

Workshops. I continue to offer workshops over Zoom to anyone in the archdiocese who wishes to attend these. I have offered this workshop many times already, on the relationship between a diocese and its parish communities. This workshop has two one-hour segments, with a break in between.

The following are the dates and times for this workshop in February:

- Friday 12 February 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm
- Friday 26 February 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm

If you wish to sign up for one of these workshops, please register with Lauri Friesen at (780) 532-9766 or exec.agm@live.ca

I am presently developing a second workshop, on our policy dealing with creating safe and caring communities in our archdiocese. This examines the procedure that is in place when a priest or deacon is accused of sexual abuse against children or vulnerable adults. A procedure is also being developed for accusations against a bishop, either of sexual abuse or of not dealing adequately with such an accusation in his diocese. I will announce this workshop when it is ready.

Year of St. Joseph. The Holy Father has declared a Year of St. Joseph for the universal Church, going from 8 December 2020 to 8 December 2021. I am putting together some elements for a Year of St. Joseph in our Archdiocese, from 19 March 2021 to the same date in 2022. Details will be announced in my pastoral letter one month from now.



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