



1 April 2019

Dear Fathers, Pastoral Assistants and Parishioners,

The Season of Lent is passing quickly. It will soon be Holy Week and the Easter Triduum. The weather has been cooperative by helping us feel like it is spring. We cannot be certain that we've seen the last of our snow for this season, of course.

Munus Docendi: Jesus Christ

Last month I spoke about the Church's belief in God, the Creator of all that exists. I turn our attention this month to the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The prologue to the Gospel of St. John gives us a very clear theology about Jesus, as he begins (in the style of the Book of Genesis): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus is that "word", the Word of the Father. As the Creator proclaimed in creating all things, "Let there be ...", we hold that this "word of God" was the second person of the Trinity, who by the Incarnation became human, being born of a human mother, but at the same time divine. This is beyond our comprehension; recall what I said in March's letter about mystery. This is a truth that we hold, although it is beyond our human understanding.

In the first centuries after the ascension of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit, there were many heresies floating around, not only outside the Church but also within the Christian community. As they reflected ever more deeply on the gospels and the events of Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, people very naturally asked the question, "Who is this Jesus anyway?" In coming up with answers to that question, some held that Jesus was a divine being who took on human form, but was not essentially human (Docetism). To them, he was a god who took on the appearance of a human man, but that he was not really so. Others took the opposite position: they held that he was merely a human being, who had some special powers from God to heal illnesses, raise the dead, and expel demons. But to them, he was not really God (Arianism). Despite such debates and heresies that lasted centuries, the true teaching of the Church prevailed: that Jesus has two natures (human and divine), and these are integrally united in the Person of Jesus. We state this clearly in the Nicene Creed, when we profess: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made."

Good Friday Veneration of the Cross

I am celebrating the Easter Triduum this year at Notre-Dame de Lourdes Parish in Girouxville. I met with their liturgy planning committee recently. As we went over the ceremonies that make up the Triduum, we got into quite a discussion about the part of the Good Friday service that is called the "Veneration of the Cross." Where we got hung up was on the question of whether the "cross" we use for that part of the service should be a

“crucifix”. That is, should there be an image of Jesus on the cross that we venerate? The answer to that question is “no”. Most of the committee were aghast.

This part of the ritual is not called “the veneration of the crucifix”, but “the veneration of the cross.” As the priest or deacon processes into the Church, three times he sings or says “Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the salvation of the world.” It is the wood of the cross that is the focus at this point. As the priest carries it forward, it is like Jesus himself who carried his cross along the Via Dolorosa. The cross should be large and burdensome, not a small cross that you could hang over your doorsill. The wood of the cross itself becomes a symbol of the suffering and death of Jesus, so it is the wood of the cross itself that we venerate, not an image of Jesus on the cross.

What I say here is only about the ritual on Good Friday afternoon. It is in no way a statement about anything except this ceremony. It is not to imply that we should not have crucifixes in our churches! It is not to say that a crucifix is unfitting for our faith and devotion. In my years as bishop of this diocese, I have heard some people suggest that we should not have a crucifix over the altar, but rather a glorified and risen Christ. This thought is misguided. The Catholic Church throughout its history has expressed great devotion for the death of Jesus Christ, which was the path that led to the resurrection.

Chrism Mass

I remind you all once again of the Chrism Mass, which takes place this year at 7:30 pm on Tuesday of Holy Week, April 16th at St. John the Baptist Cathedral in McLennan. This is always a very solemn and beautiful celebration for the whole archdiocese. At this Mass, the three holy oils used in various sacraments are blessed. As well, the priests renew their vows of service to the People and of obedience to the bishop. We always conclude with a time of fellowship in the parish hall afterwards.

If you have not done so before, consider joining us for this ceremony.

March for Life

I remind you of the annual March for Life, which takes place this year on Thursday, 9 May 2019. This event draws people from across the province to Edmonton, where we usually march between the Legislature and Edmonton City Hall. I will have more details in next month’s letter; this is a first notice, to encourage you to consider participating, especially if you have not yet done so.

I join all of you in continuing our Lenten journey of prayer and penance to Holy Week and the Easter Triduum. These are very special days, as they call on us to recall the events of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection.

Sincerely in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

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