



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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April 29, 2021

Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him, but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51-52)

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

The above passage is one we do not often hear proclaimed from the ambo. It is taken from the 9th Chapter of Luke's Gospel, a chapter filled with incredible missionary activity of Jesus. Here we find, towards the end of the chapter, our Lord's determination to follow through with his commitment to us by setting his face "like flint" towards Jerusalem. Even in this, he experienced disappointment along the way. But thanks be to God he continued with his mission. Our ministry as shepherds of the People of God is no different.

I write this letter to encourage you in your ministry at the present time. I often think of our priests in parishes who are feeling the stress of trying to organize things during a time of pandemic; I think of our priests who are in isolated places where fraternal support is not always possible and where loneliness is an ever present reality; I think of our priests who are elderly with a real burden to carry along with other elders in our society; I think of the religious who experience difficulties due to the reduction of ministries and lack of personal contact; and I think of our permanent deacons who try to accomplish their ministry of charity within these present restricted circumstances. As well, I cannot help thinking of our lay faithful whose faith is important to their lives and who have had great difficulty not only getting to Mass but even connecting with their communities. I keep all of you in my prayers and want you to know that our vocation is something precious and a gift to the Church in good times and in difficult times – just as the vocation of marriage is to couples.

With the latest restrictions now in place until the end of May (unless they are extended), I've noticed among many people a certain disappointment, fatigue, frustration, and maybe even anger. This is easy to understand as it has been a hard year, in fact, more than a year since the pandemic began. Our hopes for an end to the pandemic restrictions have risen and fallen a number of times and this has led some people to say: "What's the point of trying, I'll just wait until the vaccines eventually kick in." Unfortunately, we do not have a clear idea of what the next number of months will look

like. I believe that, like Jesus, we must, each day, set our face toward our ministry and not be deterred within our hearts as there is much we can do for others. This is the reason why we have been chosen to serve as ministers of the Gospel.

We recently had a Zoom workshop with Fr. Kappler from Southdown. We learned something about trauma and how, because of the pandemic, we can slowly be affected by a creeping fatigue and disorientation in our lives. One person commented to me that the workshop seems so long ago now. I have seen in the faces and heard in the voices, of bishops, priests and deacons, this fatigue and disappointment. Yet I have also witnessed great determination and creativity in our restricted pastoral life throughout the country.

I, too, was frustrated when I heard the news about the restrictions just imposed as we had seemed to be moving in the right direction. I saw the contradictions that were inherent in the restrictions and the strictness with which the churches were treated relative to retail sectors in society. I wrote a letter this past Wednesday to Dr. Roussin and to the Minister of Health and expressed these thoughts in the name of the Bishops in Manitoba. I felt that it was important not to just sit back, but to express what is a very real concern among people of faith. I asked for a balanced reconsideration of church attendance with special reference to funerals and weddings, events which have proven to be very difficult for people under these circumstances. Let us pray that something positive will come from this.

In the meantime, *we can do this* – as people often say despite the unwelcomed restrictions, we can do this ministry of the Gospel. We can, with God's help, keep our churches open to people, seek creative ways to make the Sacraments available, continue with our live-streamed services and be shepherds in what is temporarily a smaller field (even though the number of sheep remains much larger). We remain Eucharistic communities regardless of the virus. It is important for our people to know this as it encourages them in their faith.

Regarding the celebration of Confirmation, there will be need, in many cases, to rearrange dates and times. I will leave it up to each parish community to determine this. Once a decision has been taken, I would ask that pastors and administrators contact my office to request the faculty to confirm.

Dear Fathers and Deacons, I am very grateful for the determined way you have approached the challenges over the past year. I must tell you that I've noticed a lot of joy in your hearts – even when you are experiencing suffering and difficulty. I find this uplifting and encouraging. Thank you for your witness!

It is a curious fact that the Church, with her constant teaching of starting anew, from the grace of Christ, is able, despite our sins and our circumstances, to get up again and again and walk. In his grace and mercy, we are able to set our face toward Jerusalem and get on track again and build.

I wish to end with a quote from Pope Francis when he comments on the pandemic in *Fratelli Tutti*, paragraphs 54 and 55:

Despite these dark clouds, which may not be ignored, I would like... to invite everyone to a renewed hope, for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirits... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile. Let us continue then, to advance along paths of hope.

Yours in Christ,

* Richard .