



# Christian Service

Second Festival Letter of  
✠ Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.  
BISHOP OF PEORIA

**Second Festival Letter - Diocese of Peoria  
Epiphany - Year of Our Lord 2004  
Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.**

**CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

It is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, that a doctor of the law once asked Jesus which was the greatest of all the commandments of the Torah. Jesus answered: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matt 22:37-39) On that occasion as on so many others, Jesus clearly teaches that there is a fundamental connection between the love of God and the love of neighbor. In fact, when the Lord describes the awesome and terrible day of our last judgement, he proclaims to both those who served and those who refused to serve the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned: *truly I say to you... you did it to me.* (Matt 25: 40) All four Gospels and the entire New Testament announce that the heart of our faith is the love of God and the love of neighbor. As Jesus himself came into this world to do the will of his Father and to serve others rather than to be served, so should the community of his disciples be constituted as a Servant Church in this world. No Christian can honestly claim to love God unless that love is expressed in our love for one another. As my *First Festival Letter* was about prayer and the love and worship we owe to Almighty God, it seems appropriate that this my *Second Festival Letter* be devoted to the love and service we owe to one another.

According to God's design, human beings are unique and as unrepeatable in their distinct individuality and personal history. Each one of us has been gifted in many different and special ways, but when we consciously face reality, we must also admit that we really own nothing in this world but our own free will. Skill and ability, youth, agility, beauty and much of what is so often taken for granted are fleeting gifts. Someone who is brilliant may one day become forgetful. Athletes will grow older and slower, and the wealthy may either lose their possessions or enjoy them less and less. We are all born into this world naked and defenseless, and one day each one of us will certainly die and leave behind absolutely everything we have except for the good we may have done. God has intentionally given us our existence, our temperament, our talents, and our allotted time on this earth so that walking by faith we might choose to do what God asks and complete those works that God has entrusted to our care. Christians must not be fearful and useless servants who bury our talents and neglect our opportunities, but instead we must always try to be good stewards of our time, our talent, and our treasure for the glory of God and the service of neighbor. As Jesus commanded: *Do not lay up for yourself treasure on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* (Matt 6:19-21)

Earlier generations of Catholics preparing for Confirmation used to memorize what were called the Seven Corporal and the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy. This list of fourteen "good deeds" was very

obviously based upon the teaching of the Scriptures and constituted what was considered to be minimally necessary for living an adult life of faith. The Corporal Works were to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, shelter strangers, visit the sick, and bury the dead. The Spiritual Works were to correct sinners, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear injuries patiently, and pray for the living and the dead. I wonder if it might not be of some benefit for us today to use this list as a kind of examination of conscience regarding our willingness to be of service for the love of Christ. Every single parish in this Diocese, each one of our schools and hospitals, our Newman Centers, our Cursillo and TEC communities, our congregations of vowed religious, Catholic Charities, our vast array of organizations and programs, lay ministers, together with the bishop, priests, deacons, and seminarians all need to recognize that we serve Christ best when we serve the needs of others. It's often entirely too easy to just keep things going and allow habit or even inertia to form and direct our Christian lives. All of us as individuals and as groups must instead notice those needs all around us, examine the situation in the light of the Gospel, take stock of our current commitments, look at our priorities, and then be willing to give God and neighbor more of our time and energy to make Christ more present in this world.

We might well ask ourselves, what do our parishes or organizations do for the poor and the needy? Is Jesus Christ and his Gospel at the heart and center of our Catholic schools and Newman Centers? Are Cursillo, TEC, our Charismatic communities, and all our other religious groups and societies ready for change and renewal, open to new ideas and directions, and appropriately with the passage of time, new leadership? As a Diocese, are we meeting the needs of the elderly who did so much in earlier years to build up this local church? Do we visit Christ in the sick and those in prison? Do we welcome strangers and make people of other races and cultures feel at home in our associations and parishes. Are we peace makers and reconcilers, ready and willing to go the extra mile to help and comfort? Do we defend human dignity by promoting the Gospel of life and fearlessly defending the image and likeness of God in the unborn, the handicapped, and the aged? If we can teach, do we teach? If we are athletic, do we coach. If we can paint, or cut grass, or plow snow, or cook, or clean up, sing, or read, or minister, do we volunteer? Can we serve on committees, promote vocations, work with the young, help prepare couples for marriage, or assist new parents with their children? Even those who are bed ridden and in hospitals and nursing homes can still encourage and pray. Every single believer, from me, your bishop, down to the newest catechumen, is personally called by Jesus Christ, taught by the Word of God, and empowered by the Sacraments to love and serve in this world. That is our "job description" as Christian believers, and is therefore what the Roman Catholic Diocese of Peoria is called to live on a daily basis.

In most religious groups and communities, the same rather limited number of people are always the ones who volunteer for every need. Imagine for a moment the vast explosion of grace and goodness that might take place here in Central Illinois if every single Catholic consciously and deliberately accepted their Baptismal commission to win the whole world for Jesus Christ. How dynamic would our experience of Church be if every parish, every school and hospital, every program and group looked again to the charism of their foundation and was open to renewal according to the mind of Christ. After prayer and some discussion and reflection, we might well free ourselves from some unnecessary things, and make space for more that really matters. In our often frenetic schedules, if we were all to give a considered tithe of our time for service, we would certainly experience much more meaning in our lives and enormous peace in our hearts. The Lord Jesus Christ has promised abundant blessing in this life and infinite joy in the world to come for all those who follow him. Even a cup of water given to *a little one*, is an act of love to the very Son of

God and so has awesome and eternal significance.

This deep and abiding beatitude is most clearly manifested in the celebration of the Mass which offers us on earth a taste of heaven. As the Second Vatican Council teaches us, the Eucharist is *the source and the summit* of our lives as Catholic Christians. The Mass is the *source* because it renews and truly makes present among us that fountain of grace which is the one perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Mass is the *summit* because we are also asked to bring to the altar who we are, all that we do, and everything we offer in union with Christ our High Priest. Thus there is an intrinsic connection between the Eucharist that nourishes us and all that we do as disciples of the Lord. There can be no sustained commitment to Gospel values, to justice and peace, and to the works of mercy that is not fed by the *Bread that has come down from heaven*. There also can be no fruitfulness in worship if our faith in the Eucharist is not validated by lives more and more devoted to love and service. So may all of us who live in the Diocese of Peoria assemble faithfully for Mass, and at the conclusion of every liturgy, may we truly *go in peace*, ready and willing *to love and serve the Lord*, embodied in the many ways that we try to love and serve our neighbor.