

Choices



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

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November 20, 2016
+Feast of Christ the King

To the Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Consecrated Men and Women, those engaged in the apostolate of Catholic Education, and all the Faithful of the Diocese of Peoria:

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

I am happy to offer for your meditation my fifteenth annual Festival Letter as your bishop. Traditionally, such letters coincide with the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord in early January as a way of announcing the special Feasts for the New Year, and offering a bishop an additional opportunity to teach on a relevant topic.

I am sending this reflection on “Choice” to mark the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy that comes to a close with the Solemnity of Christ the King. This letter is a fruit of my own meditation throughout this Holy Year. I hope that it may help all of you to conclude this graced time with concrete resolutions to better live out our identity as Christians in an increasingly hostile world. I pray that this Year of Mercy has touched each of your lives and emboldened you to bring that Mercy to the world.

Please share this letter far and wide. I ask pastors to make copies readily available in your churches and to print excerpts in your parish bulletins. It could make good food for discussion at RCIA, Bible studies, Adult Ed programs, even high school youth groups. I ask our principals and DRE’s to consider an in-service discussion with your faculty and staff. I have no pretension that you will consider my musings as a masterpiece of Catholic literature, but in my ministry as Chief Shepherd of the flock entrusted to me, I hope my festival letters will be of some assistance in your spiritual growth.

As this Extraordinary Holy Year comes to a close, and we approach the threshold of a new Year of Grace, may our Blessed Mother, patroness of our Diocese and Mother of the Church, keep us all close to her Immaculate Heart.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Daniel R. Jenky C.S.C.' with a cross at the beginning.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Fifteenth Festival Letter - AD 2017

Choice

The priority given to unrestrained *personal choice* is perhaps the most powerful engine now driving our contemporary culture. Today, more and more people simply assert that they have an absolute right to do whatever they want, any way they want, and in almost any circumstance. The popular motto for this way of living is “be yourself.” The mass media relentlessly celebrates almost every expression of self-invention, while generally disparaging any received truths or traditional values. Obligations not autonomously chosen such as those defined by nature, given by family, or shared in community, and most especially those laws mandated by God are simply dismissed. The notion of tolerance has also been radically redefined into mere moral relativism. What is usually missed is the fact that moral neutrality (recognizing no right or wrong) is itself the articulation of a moral absolute. This way of thinking proposes that there may be *my* truth or there may be *your* truth but there is certainly no such thing as *the* truth. The only authoritative criterion then left is that of the individual. This posited axiom, of course, rejects the notion of personal sin (seeing what is right and choosing what is wrong) and also generally ignores all the manifest consequences of human brokenness, self-deception, malice, and intermittent bouts of appalling stupidity.

Within this conceptual framework, the role of authority is largely reduced to negotiating among competing opinions, except for those arbitrarily determined to be politically correct. One insightful commentator has observed that “modern culture worships a new trinity: Health, Wealth, and Hedonism, despite the obvious fact that these new gods make quite contradictory demands.” In a world where many lack even the basic necessities, there is, for example, a growing insistence on eating only the right kinds of food, grown by the right people, and in the right way. Being over-weight is stringently condemned, and just smoking a cigar is widely prohibited. Illogically, inhaling marijuana is touted almost as a kind of saving sacrament. Among all the ceaseless caveats regarding health, the unassailable evidence that sexual promiscuity is often deadly or at the very least medically dangerous is widely ignored. Cohabitation, out of wedlock birth, easy divorce, families without fathers, and most especially abortion on demand have all dramatically undermined the essential human responsibility for raising children. Along with this moral anarchy, there is also an increasing malice towards many of the foundational values of Christian civilization. Pope Benedict once described this deconstructive perspective as “the dictatorship of relativism.”

This kind of freedom, that is really no freedom at all, certainly has had an enormous impact upon the lives of believers. Relativism, while often unexamined, is certainly in “the very air we breathe” in the 21st century. Because Catholic Christianity is a faith based upon the authority of Scripture and Tradition and is structurally hierarchical, we will necessarily appear more and more counter cultural if we remain faithful to what we hold to be true. The story of the “fall” in the Book of Genesis explicates the biblical perspective on *truth and falsehood* and *right and wrong*. As biblical scholars have noted, in a certain sense the sin of Adam and Eve was an assertion of absolute moral autonomy and the rejection of communion with God and neighbor. Very much like today’s increasingly atheistic culture, in the story of our first parents can be seen the conscious decision to interpret human existence solely on the basis of individual knowledge and personal preference. Adam and Eve came to see God as a competitor rather than a partner. They believed that if God truly was God, then they could not truly be free. The prohibition of a single fruit in Eden seemed to erase any appreciation of God’s much greater invitation to feast upon absolutely everything else offered in paradise. The Creator who had so generously shared the gift of existence with his creation out of no necessity except for the sake of love was rejected for the sake of human selfishness. The intense sadness of sin and the certainty of death were the inevitable consequences.

Catholic tradition confidently teaches that men and women were created and redeemed in order to participate in the sheer bliss of God’s own life. Through the gift of grace, humanity can experience freedom for the good, in lives based on faith, hope, and love, but also built upon prayer, holiness, harmony, justice, mercy, compassion, and service. Following Christ restores humanity to the original beatitude of happiness, while as Saint Augustine once perceptively observed, sin is what only makes us unhappy. (cf. *Confessions*, 10) Believers therefore freely embrace moral and religious truths, family ties, friendships, and social commitments in order to live in relationship with God and neighbor. Through our membership in the Church, we are not called to do our *own thing*, as in the language of pop culture, but rather to do *Christ’s thing*. Christianity is basically the life of Christ lived out in the individual lives of intentional disciples. Essentially, our free human *choice* is to follow Jesus. As the Lord insists according to the Gospel of John: *The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life. They will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me. The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can steal from the Father. The Father and I are one.* (John 10:27-30)

Among the many blessings of renewal inherent in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the work of catechesis has perhaps been the most marked by conspicuous failure. In some instances in our religious education programs and even in some of our Catholic schools, the substance of our religion was simply not passed on to the next

generation. Even the foundational invitation to *choose* Jesus as Lord was not always articulated. Those who today work with the young report that a significant number of the so called *millennials* (those whose world view has been largely formed in this 21st century) represent what could be a third generation of *Catholic Lites*. Their parents and even some of their grandparents may have only minimally practiced their faith and so gave poor example of Christ centered lives. Scandals among elements of the clergy and the collapse of some religious orders have also played a role in the loss of Catholic identity. Many young people who already tend to be *commitment adverse* are perhaps not so much hostile to the Church as they are indifferent. I am happy to report that in our parishes, in our schools, in our renewal programs, in our Newman Centers there are certainly many committed young Catholics, but among the general population of their age, believers may constitute only a minority. So in today's culture, the challenge of nurturing or even introducing faith is very real. As Saint Paul once warned: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their likings and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.* (2nd Timothy 4:3-4)

So the greatest possible expression of Christian mercy in a world where relativism has become almost unassailable would be for the Church to boldly preach the truth, in season and out of season, because only *the truth will set you free.* (John 8:32). The first and the greatest truth to which we must always give persistent witness is that Jesus is not *a way*, but rather he is *the way, the truth, and the life.* (John 14:6) This is not just one choice among many in an endless array of diverse spiritualities. Meeting Christ, knowing Christ, believing in Christ, and following Christ is the one necessary path to beatitude in this world and in the world that is to come. Everything the Church says and does must reflect this core conviction that: *There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved.* (Acts 4:12)

Everyone who is baptized is personally claimed by Christ as his disciple and personally called by Christ to be his missionary. As in every era of Church history, in order for the Lord to be better known and loved, we will always need saints and heroes. Every believer must use every possible opportunity to witness to their faith in the Savior. Christianity is not so much a theory for living as it is a relationship with Jesus. Just knowing *the do's and don'ts* of Catholicism makes no sense without first knowing the Living Lord who is the heart and head of his Church. In prayer and especially in the Sacraments, in the experience of community, and in generous works of love and service, we proclaim Christ to our neighbor and celebrate together the transforming knowledge of his great love. As Saint Paul once exhorted: *This may be a wicked age, but your lives should redeem it. Do not be thoughtless but recognize what is the will of the Lord.* (Ephesians 5:16-17)

It is an inescapable fact, that the fastest dying religions are those that tend to *blend in* rather than *stand out*. Any community with a future has to have boundaries and clear markers of identity. The God revealed in the Bible demonstrates both judgement and mercy, and this one true God is certainly no mere affirmer of our preferences and appetites. We cannot with any integrity observe the rituals of Catholicism in church, while basically living like pagans in the world. Relentless self-indulgence is inevitably a human dead end, while the discipline of desire is a necessary component for any lasting success in learning, athletics, the arts, professions, business, and most certainly in the journey of faith. It is therefore an expression of love, for the Church to boldly teach about right and wrong, about marriage and the family, about human sexuality, about the gift of life, about spiritual realities, and about the emotional emptiness of selfish consumerism. The Apostle Paul exhorted: *We must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are awaiting in hope the Appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Christ Jesus. He sacrificed himself for us in order to set us free from all wickedness and to purify a people so that it could be his very own and would have no ambition except to do good. Now this is what you are to say, whether you are giving instruction or correcting errors.* (Titus 2:12-15)

Now *unworthy though I am*, I do serve as your bishop and share in the apostolic office of Paul and Titus. In this my Fifteenth Festival Letter, I would therefore like to give what I believe to be an essential *instruction*. Faith is always made stronger by sharing it with others. Everything we do in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria should consciously be designed to evangelize and make new disciples. We must never limit our efforts to simply maintaining what we are but should instead work harder than ever to be what God wants us to become. As Pope Francis teaches: “The Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1st John 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” This should be the core inspiration for our parishes and schools, our hospitals and charities, our religious communities and our prayer groups, our service and support organizations. I enthusiastically encourage the various discipleship programs in many of our parishes, schools, college ministries, and even in some of our athletic organizations. Parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, coaches and teachers, sponsors and volunteers should always be willing to personally witness to their faith. All of us, and not just priests, deacons, and religious, are given many opportunities to bring others to Christ. Even those members of the Church who are physically weakened by age or illness can contribute the powerful and even irreplaceable support of their prayers.

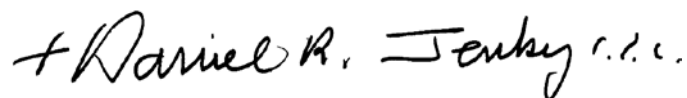
We should always remember that we have *Good News* to proclaim. When facing sin, addiction, despair, loneliness, trauma, and sickness, in a world torn apart by terror, *the Way of Christ* is filled with inspiring hope and tremendous love. Saint John Paul II

repeatedly urged the Church not to be afraid. Christianity simply *works* as a way of living, both in good times and in bad, because it embodies God's loving plan for our existence. There is true joy in giving and serving. There is real comfort in Christian fellowship. It is *great to be Catholic*, and there are wonderful moments of exultation in worship and prayer. There is certainly a taste of ecstasy in knowing the Lord in this passing world. Even in the face of death, there is the consoling promise of unending rapture in a world that is yet to come. The promises of the scriptures are very real, and there is no greater blessing than to live according to the Law of the Lord. *God himself has said: I will not fail you or desert you, and so we can say with confidence: 'With the Lord to help me, I fear nothing'.*" (Hebrews 13: 5-6)

Demonstrably, mere family history, ethnicity, or social pressure are no longer compelling enough reasons to become or to remain a Catholic Christian. Belonging to the Lord, however, does profoundly make sense of our human existence and empowers a transforming life of grace within God's Holy Catholic Church. Remember that: *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Do not let yourselves be led astray by all sorts strange doctrines.* (Hebrews 13:8-9) And so in everyone's life, there is a critical choice to be made, that is either fundamentally for God or against God. With the greatest possible conviction, I urge all of you to *Choose* the truth rather than self-deception. *Choose* the community of believers rather than personal isolation. *Choose* life rather than death. *Choose* salvation rather than damnation. Intentionally and enthusiastically, make the best of all possible human choices. *Choose* Jesus Christ as your Lord and your God.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first and the greatest of the Lord's disciples, pray with you and for you, for the entire Catholic Church, and especially for our beloved Diocese of Peoria.

May Almighty God bless you, + the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Festival Letter 2017 – Calendar

In the early centuries of Catholic Christianity, when calendars were uncommon and often imprecise, a bishop would send out an annual “Festival Letter” to announce the proper dates for observing the fasts and feasts of the Liturgical Year. It was not uncommon to also use such a letter as a means of instruction for the faithful. I have established this custom in our Diocese both to foster a greater love for the liturgy and to afford myself an additional opportunity for teaching.

Dear brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord has shone upon us and shall ever be manifest among us, until the day of His return. Through the rhythms of times and seasons, let us celebrate the mysteries of our salvation.

Let us recall the year’s culmination, the Sacred Easter Triduum of the Lord: His Last Supper, His Crucifixion, His Burial, and His Rising, celebrated between the evening of Thursday, April 13, and the evening of Sunday, April 16.

Each Easter, as on each Sunday, Holy Mother Church makes present the great and saving deed by which Christ has conquered sin and death.

From Easter are reckoned all the days we keep holy:

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, in the Year of Our Lord 2017, will occur on the first day of March .

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. In commemoration of the Lord’s death on the cross, all Fridays of Lent are days of obligatory abstinence. Abstinence from meat is also recommended on all the Fridays of the year. As the commemoration of St. Patrick, patron of all Irish, falls on Friday, March 17, I dispense the abstinence from meat on that day.

The annual Chrism Mass, during which the priests renew their ministerial commitment, will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Tuesday of Holy Week, April 11.

No other activities or pastoral responsibilities, except the need to tend to the dying, should keep a priest from attending the Chrism Mass. I also invite the faithful of our diocese to join us for this celebration as they keep their priests in prayer.

The Church will keep her most solemn night of vigil and prayer to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Saturday, the 15th of April. According to the ancient and universal practice of the Church, the Easter Vigil may not begin until after nightfall. In Central Illinois, sunset is estimated to begin at 7:38 P.M. CDT in Peoria (7:29 P.M. CDT in Danville and 7:43 P.M. CDT in Moline). The Easter Vigil at the Cathedral will be celebrated at 8:15 P.M.

On Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter, the 23rd of April I encourage my Vicars Forane to work with the clergy, religious, and laity in their area to prepare a common celebration at a central location for the conclusion of the Novena of Divine Mercy which will begin on Good Friday, the 14th of April.

The Ascension of the Lord will be commemorated on Sunday, the 28th of May, according to the decision of the bishops of the Illinois Province. Pentecost, the joyful conclusion of the Great Fifty Days of Easter, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 4th of June.

Any Catholic in a state of serious sin is obligated to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday. All Catholics are especially urged to confess their sins during the penitential season of Lent, during Advent, before the great festivals, and regularly throughout the year.

In a special way our Divine Savior gave the Church the gift of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to make present the Paschal Mystery for all people of every time and place. This year, the Diocese of Peoria will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Orders in several ways.

On Saturday, the 20th of May at 10:30 a.m. at the Cathedral, I will ordain the next class of Permanent Deacons, along with two men to the transitional diaconate. On Saturday, the 27th of May at 10:30 a.m., I rejoice to ordain a new priest for service to our Diocese.

I invite and encourage the clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay-faithful to join with me at these great celebrations. All priests serving in the Diocese of Peoria are expected to participate in the Ordination of Priests. Except the need to tend to the dying, no other pastoral duty or personal obligation is of greater importance than welcoming our new brother to our presbyterate.

Likewise, the Pilgrim Church proclaims the Passover of the Lord in the feasts of the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, and the Saints, and in the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed for the Year of Our Lord, 2017.

Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children will be celebrated on Tuesday, the 23rd of January.

The Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary will be transferred to Monday the 20th of March, in favor of the Lenten Sunday.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord will be celebrated on Saturday, the 25th of March.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary will be celebrated on Tuesday, the 15th of August, and is a holy day of obligation this year.

The Feast of Saint Crescent, whose relics are solemnly enshrined in Corpus Christi Church, Galesburg, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 27th of August, as a solemnity in the Shrine-Church.

Feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, patroness of our diocesan vocations program, will not be celebrated on the 1st of October in favor of the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time. However, prayers and activities in support of priestly vocations are encouraged to still take place. The Diocesan Novena for Vocations in her honor will begin on the 23rd of September.

The Solemnity of All Saints, a holy day of obligation, will be celebrated on Wednesday, the 1st of November. The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed will be observed on Thursday, the 2nd of November.

The Solemnity of Christ the King will be celebrated on Sunday, the 26th of November.

The Church will celebrate the beginning of the new liturgical year of grace and prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, the 3rd of December.

In the Year of Our Lord 2017, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary will be celebrated on Friday, the 8th of December, this is a holy day of obligation as well as the Patronal Feast of the Diocese of Peoria.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas, will be celebrated on Tuesday, the 12th of December.

Christmas will be on Monday, the 25th of December. Masses offered on Sunday after 4:00 p.m., Christmas Eve, should use the texts proper to the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord. The Faithful are encouraged to fulfill their Sunday obligation by assisting at Holy Mass on Saturday evening or Sunday morning, the 23rd or 24th of December.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is celebrated on Monday, the 1st of January in the Year of Our Lord 2018. I encourage all Catholics to give proper honor to our Most Blessed Mother and to beg God's Mercy at the beginning of the New Year. However, in 2018, January 1st is not a holy day of obligation.

To better enjoy the infinite treasury of merit won by our Divine Savior, in accord with the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* and the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, "the diocesan bishop in his own diocese may bestow the papal blessing with the plenary indulgence, using the proper formulary, three times a year on solemn feasts, which he will designate...."

As Bishop of Peoria, I am happy to bestow such blessing with the plenary indulgence during the Year of Our Lord 2017 at the end of Holy Mass for the great Solemnities of Easter Vigil, Pentecost Day, and Christmas Eve.

Further, to enhance the devotional life of the faithful and the liturgical life of our parishes, I have encouraged a return to the practice of Rogation Days to mark the change of seasons. I have requested the Holy See to confirm these days as part of the official calendar of our local Church. Pending their confirmation, I encourage pastors to observe these Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria:

The 22nd day of January to coincide with the national day of prayer and fasting for the dignity of human life.

The 23rd day of June to pray for healthy growth and good weather, associated with the Nativity of St. John the Baptist

The 13th day of September to highlight the fruits of the harvest, associated with the Triumph of the Cross

The 7th day of December to highlight the family, associated with our patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception.

To Jesus Christ, who is, was, and who is to come, the Lord of all time and history, be endless praise, for ever and ever. Amen.