



## Anniversaries

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Among the important characteristics of our humanity is the wonderful capacity to remember. Our memories both as individuals and a community remind us of who we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go. History is a significant human responsibility. We need to record our story and pass on our collective recollections if future generations are to live consciously and deliberately. The opposite of memory is amnesia, when either through accident, illness, or much more sadly through neglect, our story is forgotten. It is almost as if we lose part of our soul, a portion of our essential self, when memory is lost or erased.

Anniversaries are great opportunities to remember. That is why we celebrate birthdays, important dates, and jubilees, and why we mark significant memorials. We can only know who we are today when we can remember the moments, the incidents, the motives, the changes and all the challenges of our past. The servant of God, Pope John Paul II, always gave special significance to the celebration of important dates in Christian history and the anniversaries of great Church events. Most especially in the Great Jubilee of AD 2000, the Holy Father called the Universal Church to remember twenty past centuries of Christianity, and to welcome with hope and enormous joy the inauguration of a new springtime of faith in the New Millennium.

Five years ago was the 125th anniversary of the arrival in Peoria of John Lancaster Spalding, our founding bishop. At that particular moment, we were between bishops and not really able to mark the occasion. This year, we begin the 130th year of our diocesan history. We are completing an enormously successful capital campaign, For our Faith, For our Children, and For our Future, that will significantly enhance the resources available for our parishes, schools, Newman Centers, and religious education programs. We have also just begun construction of a new Pastoral Center named in honor of Bishop Spalding. Some of the folks in the Chancery have also reminded me that this is my fifth year serving as your bishop, my tenth year ministering in the episcopacy, and the fortieth year of my religious profession.

Anniversaries are always an opportunity to look back, to remember and to give thanks. Even more importantly, they constitute a challenge to look ahead, to dream and to plan for the future. Our future as a local church will be filled with rich promise if we will be faithful to our mission as a community of believers. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who has invited us to be his Baptized People, the People of God. We are Catholic men and women living in this specific moment in time, worshipping, building our lives on the foundation of love, and serving in the Church of Peoria.

This Catholic Diocese was established with enormous faith and immense sacrifice. First French missionaries, then priests from the Dioceses of Vincennes, Saint Louis, and Chicago all labored first to plant and nurture the Catholic faith here in Central Illinois. In the beginning our numbers were few and scattered, but the Good Lord steadily blessed the efforts of the priests, consecrated religious, and especially the laity enabling this Diocese to grow and prosper. The Gospel was preached, the Sacraments celebrated, parish churches and schools built, and loving care offered to orphans, the poor and the sick. Our formula for success has always been the same: as a community, we keep our eyes fixed on heaven as we offer our time, talent, and treasure here on this earth. Life with God forever is our promised destiny. This Gospel truth instills everything we say and do with grace filled energy and immense significance.

According to our Catholic tradition, a bishop is especially charged to be the teacher of the local church entrusted to his care. As the Eighth Bishop of Peoria, I feel a special responsibility to continue all the good work of those who came before me and to pass on the True Faith, boldly and undiminished. Sadly today, there are some adult

Catholics who were never instructed in the doctrine and morality of our Church. For some young Catholics, Confirmation is experienced as a kind of graduation from Catholic practice until the moment when they marry, bring their own children into the world, and hopefully become active again in parish life. Many married couples are looking for ways to enhance their love and commitment. Most parents are very anxious not to surrender their children to today's aggressively pagan culture. Everywhere there seems to be a hunger for deeper knowledge of the Scriptures, a richer life of prayer, greater opportunities for service to the poor, and a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I sometimes fear that rather than attending to these vital challenges, I devote entirely too much time simply maintaining what is already in place. Such a cowardly stance would be a grave betrayal of the vast zeal of those who have preceded me in this Episcopal ministry. What does give me enormous encouragement, however, is the great goodness of the presbyterate that I am so privileged to head, the energetic service of our diaconate, the obvious holiness and commitment of our consecrated religious, and the impressive talent and energy of our many lay ministers, administrators, teachers, and parish leaders. An essential aspect of my ordained role is to utilize, lead, and encourage all the many gifts Almighty God has given to everyone in our local church.

To evangelize is essential to the mission of this diocese and the entire Catholic Church. This great commission comes directly from the lips of the Savior, and not just to the clergy and religious, but to each and every baptized believer. We assemble as a Church to praise and thank God, to love and serve our neighbor, and to announce the Good News. The grace and goodness of Christ is so wonderful, how could we not share the experience with absolutely everyone we meet? That is the mission of our Cathedral, our parishes, our schools, our monasteries, religious communities, King's Retreat House, our Newman Centers, our Hospitals, Catholic Charities, Cursillo, TEC and every other Catholic association, group, and program in this diocese.

No Catholic community should ever think of itself as if it were merely a private neighborhood club. We are never just a member of our own parish or a particular religious organization or apostolate. We are also members of a diocese, which is our local church and we always are essentially a part of the Universal Church. In today's circumstances, it is often necessary that clusters of parishes work more closely together. When appropriate and possible, combined schools, a shared youth program, cooperative religious education and Bible programs, a unified RCIA process, and regional outreach programs are often preferable in a given locality to individual efforts of lesser quality, fewer resources, and minimal participation.

Parish schedules should be adjusted to serve the needs of an entire region. Evening masses, Spanish liturgies, Lenten and Advent services, volunteer opportunities, special celebrations, missions and retreats, Eucharistic Adoration and pilgrimages will become even more effective if they are sponsored and supported by neighboring parishes and schools working together. The standard of pastoral discernment should never be merely our own convenience or comfort, but rather what will most effectively promote the work of Christ and build up His Kingdom.

As we commemorate the arrival of our first bishop 130 years ago and work together in our shared mission for the future of this Catholic Diocese of Peoria, it has been suggested to me by the heads of our various ministries that in a special way we ask our Blessed Mother to pray with us and for us as we renew our devotion for her beloved image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. From the first days of Catholic Christianity, believers have always worked and rejoiced under Mary's prayerful protection. In many manifested ways in our local church, we have experienced the fact that never was it known, that anyone who fled to her protection, sought her help, or implored her intercession, was ever left unaided. There is simply nothing we cannot achieve for the glory of God and the

service of neighbor when the Church on earth agrees in prayer with the Glorious Virgin Mary and the angels and saints in heaven.

It might be well to recall the role of icons and holy images in the liturgy and spirituality of the Catholic Church. When the Word became flesh, the Creator truly entered into creation. In Jesus Christ the Divine image and likeness was fully revealed and restored to humanity. To see Jesus is to see the Father, because Christ is the image, the icon (eikon), the sacrament that makes God present to the world. Through the gift of grace, the Church which is Christ's Body, is also called to be the image, the icon, the sacrament which makes present the Lord's wondrous love and mercy. Therefore it is now not only lawful, but most helpful to honor the glorified humanity of Mary and the saints who are themselves "icons" of the Risen Christ. Their holy images are actually windows into heaven. The icons of Christ, the saints and the angels encourage the Church to perceive a graced reality that is eternal. In the Lord Jesus, what was invisible has become visible and what was corruptible has become incorruptible.

In order to read the incarnational message of holy icons, we must first learn their language, which like the New Testament itself is simple, consistent, direct, and without unnecessary embellishments. Every line, shape, and color has a very specific meaning. The eyes, for example, are usually drawn large and lively to show the inner intensity of the soul. It has been observed that these holy images are full of eyes because they echo the Gospel words: My eyes have seen your salvation (Luke 2:30). The nose is often long and narrow because the saints inhale the breath of spiritual fragrance (Ephesians 5:2). The mouth is usually small because the saints hunger for nothing that God does not provide. The faces depicted in icons often intentionally look out at the beholder rather than themselves being merely looked upon. When Christ is shown, His outer cloak is usually red to remind us that he assumed our human flesh and blood, while his inner garment is the blue of the heavens indicating His divinity. When Mary is depicted, the colors are normally reversed symbolizing her human cooperation with the Divine. The background of the icons is typically gold signifying the glorious and uncreated light that the transfigured saints experience in the beatitude of heaven. All Christian icons are really tangible prayers that celebrate the great goodness and condescension of our God, who in Christ shared our human nature so that we might share His Divine nature.

The much revered image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help very specifically speaks to us through this ancient iconic language of Catholic theology and spirituality. Since the early 14th century, this icon which most likely originated on the Isle of Crete, was venerated in Rome at the Church of Saint Matthew, once situated halfway between the Basilicas of Saint Mary Major and the Church of Our Savior Jesus Christ in Saint John Lateran. In the middle of the 19th century, Saint Alphonsus Liguori built a new church in honor of the Most Holy Redeemer on that same location. Blessed Pius IX later bestowed the care of the holy image upon the Redemptorist Fathers, and this great missionary congregation soon spread devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help throughout the world. The Memorare prayer to the Virgin Mary is closely associated with this sacred and revered icon.

In the picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, the child Jesus is depicted in the arms of his Blessed Mother after being frightened by a vision of two angels holding the instruments of his Passion. Almost losing one of his sandals in his haste, Jesus is lovingly caught up in the embrace of his Blessed Mother, who gently supports him and holds his tiny hand in her comforting hand. Mary's luminous eyes, however, look directly out into our eyes. Our Lady reminds us of the terrible price of our salvation and calls us to continuing conversion through a deeper love for her Son. On Mary's veil is a shining star because she is the Star of the Sea that offers hope and refuge even through life's fiercest storms. Mary is crowned with a golden crown because she is the Mother of God and the Help of Christians. As she perfectly reflects the endless grace and goodness of Jesus, she does not despise even the petitions of sinners.

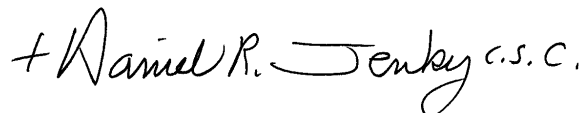
As the Catholic Diocese of Peoria strives to serve God and neighbor in this 21st Century of Grace, it seems most appropriate that we also renew our love and devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Mary was the first to receive Jesus Christ into her life as she brought the Son of God into this world. She was the first and greatest of His disciples who faithfully pondered in her heart what she did not fully understand. In Cana of Galilee, Jesus worked his first great miracle at her confident request and she remained faithful to Him even beneath the cross. It was also from the cross that she was named mother of the Beloved Disciple and of all those whom Jesus loves. She was also present in prayer with the Apostles when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church on Pentecost Sunday. She is the Woman described in the Book of Revelation, who as the faithful daughter of Israel gave birth to the Messiah. She is also the type and symbol of the New Israel of God that is the Christian Church, waiting in hope and expectation for the Lord's glorious return.

In our Diocese and especially in all our parishes, schools, communities and apostolates, may numerous believers continue to surround her holy picture, all confident of her help, imitating her example, and trusting in her maternal care. As we remember and celebrate 130 years of Catholic history and tradition in this Diocese, may we also boldly face our present challenges and crosses, comforted, strengthened, and reassured by the prayers of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Our life is grace. Our vocation is praise, thanks, and service. Our Blessed Mother is Mary. Our future is heaven. Our great love is God.

O Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for us.

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

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

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, CSC  
Bishop of Peoria