

Fear of the Lord



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

MOST REV. DANIEL R. JENKY, C.S.C.
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF PEORIA



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
419 N.E. MADISON AVENUE
PEORIA, ILLINOIS 61603
PHONE: 309 671 1550
FAX: 309 671 1576

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+Our Lady of Guadalupe

To the Clergy, Religious, and Faithful of the Diocese of Peoria:

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

“Fear of the Lord,” may seem to be a somewhat unusual topic for a “Festival Letter”, but I have my reasons. It seems to me that reverence and awe before Almighty God is necessary for all of us, especially in these godless, secular days.

May God bless you in this coming year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C." with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Seventeenth Festival Letter - AD 2019

At every celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, after the renewal of Baptismal Promises, and just before the Anointing with Holy Chrism, the Bishop extends his hands over the confirmands and says the Prayer of Confirmation which includes the following invocation: “Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety; fill them with the spirit of the *fear of the Lord*.” You might well ask why being filled with *fear* is included among those most precious gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are deemed essential to living the Christian life. In this letter I will attempt to give at least something of an answer.

Certainly, even in the natural order, some experience of fear is simply necessary for living a safe and healthy life. Children need to learn a bit of fear just in order to survive. Sharp knives, hot stoves, high places, busy streets, and in these calamitous days, the warning *danger/stranger* are certainly required lessons for the very young and vulnerable. Teenagers whose physical brain development is not yet complete, also need to learn to fear unnecessary risk taking, aggressive driving, promiscuous sex, and dangerous drugs. Even mature men and women need to acknowledge that there are fearful consequences for mindless behavior and bad choices. Self-aware adults should never ignore prudent fears but instead endeavor to enhance their lives by honestly facing both the challenges and the limitations of human existence.

The *Fear of the Lord* as a vital gift of the Holy Spirit is, however, much more important in life than mere caution or ordinary prudence. Exhortations about *holy fear* are present throughout the Bible. *Fear of the Lord* is repeatedly emphasized as being necessary in the journey of faith. The Book of Deuteronomy summarizes this foundational message of the Law: *After the Lord your God shall you go and Him shall you fear and His commands shall you keep and His voice shall you heed and Him shall you worship and to Him shall you cleave.* (Deuteronomy 13:5) The Psalms rather often express similar convictions: *Come children and hear me that I may teach you the fear of the Lord,* (Psalm 34:11) The Prophet Isaiah in harmony with the other prophets recommends: *a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and delight in the fear of the Lord.*

(Isaiah 11:2) That the *Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, (Proverbs 1:7) and that *The Lord's fear is wisdom's foundation* (Proverbs 15:33) are persistent themes throughout the biblical books of wisdom.

This emphasis continues as well in many places in the New Testament. The Savior Himself taught that *whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*. (Matthew 12:30). Jesus also insisted that *not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*. (Matthew 7:21) In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches quite emphatically: *I will show you who to fear. Fear God who has the authority to cast into hell. Believe me, He is the one you must fear*. (12:5) Saint Paul strongly condemns those who have *no fear of God before their eyes* (Romans 3:18), or as the Letter to the Hebrews teaches: *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. (Hebrews 10:31) The Book of Revelation almost thunders with the same deep conviction: *Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgement has come*. (14:7)

The Hebrew and Greek words used in the scriptures to describe *holy fear* indicate a range of meaning from sheer *terror*, to immense *awe* to deepest *reverence* before the Lord who is by definition infinite, eternal, and omnipotent. The God revealed in the Bible is a tremendous mystery and an endless reality. There is enormous comfort in the scriptures but also enormous challenge. The fulness of Divine truth simply transcends our human perceptions of both redemption and judgement. Saint Paul once rhapsodized: *How rich are the depths of God, how deep His wisdom and knowledge, and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods! Who could ever know the mind of the Lord?* (Romans 11:33-34) For example in the Gospels, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is described as being both merciful and just, a gentle Abba but also a perfect judge. Believers are called persistently to seek what is good and to turn away from what is evil, because as the *Imitation of Christ* observes: “He discovered iniquity even in the angels.

We cannot pick and choose among the truths that God discloses about Himself. Disciples are therefore commanded to respond with profound awe before the Godhead and with faith filled obedience to all His commandments. Without this *holy fear*, the One True God could easily be reduced merely to a kind of tame and invented deity, invoked only on our own terms, usually just to ritualize our happy or sad occasions. This is certainly a false god, basically indifferent to right and wrong, and honored only to affirm our preferences. This theological self-deception is fundamentally destructive, because like all lies it inevitably leads nowhere. For

as the Bible teaches: *Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and swerve from evil.* (Proverbs 1:7)

So as believers, we are not just asked to know something about God, but instead we are invited to actually know God, to have a personal experience of God, to surrender to God, to cleave to God whole heartedly and without any reservation. The great philosopher and theologian Rudolf Otto once wrote that “attraction to and fear of God are the primary elements of religious experience.” C.S. Lewis, writing about his own personal experience said: “You would feel a wonder and a certain shrinking - an inadequacy to cope with such a visitant, and of prostration before it. This experience may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the *Numinous*.” Christian *fear of the Lord* is certainly a taste of absolute holiness, irreducible and ultimately indescribable. We are called to be whole hearted and passionate about our faith in the wondrous and totally absorbing, endless truth of God.

Any authentic vision of God is always life changing. A first conversion and subsequent experiences of continuing conversion are often inspired by perceptive moments of fear and trembling, of awe and wonder before the Lord. In prayer and worship as well as in selfless service to others, it is possible to be overwhelmed by God’s compelling, even dangerous love. God insists that we love Him with our whole heart, mind, strength, and soul, and then love our neighbor as ourselves. There is nothing tame about these two great commandments. God’s great love demands that we also try to love greatly.

Recently, at a Day of Recollection for the priests of our Diocese, the preacher challenged the clergy to remember the absolute wonder they should always feel lifting up the Host above the people who are coming to Holy Communion. “This is what it is like to hold God in your hands.” At every Mass, priests and people alike hear God’s saving Word in the Scriptures, and through the power of the Holy Spirit experience the Lord’s one, perfect sacrifice on the cross that made perfect atonement for sin and offered perfect praise and thanks to God the Father. If we realize what we are doing, our worship should at the very least make us tremble a bit, even if only in our hearts and souls.

The Mass is therefore never merely an obligation, not simply a gathering of friends and neighbors, certainly not just one thing among many other things we do on Saturday evenings, Sunday mornings, or even daily. The Mass is a profound epiphany of faith that truly unites heaven to earth, brings adoring angels into our company, gives us a glimpse of the saints in glory, and most wondrously allows us

to truly receive the Risen Christ into our souls and bodies. There is grace filled *fear of the Lord* whenever we consciously *taste and see the great goodness of the Lord* and then determine to *walk in His ways*.

Our prayer and worship should not be about satisfying our own expectations but rather should be an expression of our fascination before God's boundless and eternal mystery. Saint Augustine offered a powerful description of how we are not the measure of the Divine reality but rather how the Divine reality should always measure us: "When we lift up our hearts to Him, our heart is His altar. We propitiate Him by our Priest, His Only Begotten Son. We sacrifice blood-stained victims to Him when we fight for the truth, *as far as shedding our blood*. (Hebrews 12:4) We burn the sweetest incense for Him, when we are in His sight on fire with devout and holy love. We vow to Him and offer to Him the gifts He has given to us and the gift of ourselves. And we have annual festivals and fixed days appointed and consecrated for the remembrance of His benefits, lest ingratitude and forgetfulness should creep in as the years roll by. We offer Him on the altar of our heart, the sacrifice of humility and praise, and the flame on the altar is the burning fire of charity." Or as a contemporary hymn rightly acclaims: *Our God is an awesome God*.

When we finally do learn to rightly *fear the Lord*, we can then be liberated from all our other fears. As the First Letter of John teaches: *Perfect love casts out fear*. (1st John 4:18) Even in the face of troubles, sickness, wars, natural disasters, persecutions, scandals, or betrayals, our ultimate peace can rest securely in the God who is truly Almighty. Under the Lordship of Christ, we already begin to know a boundless life that not even death can take away. As Saint Paul reassured the Church of Rome: *I am convinced, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate us from God's love*. (Romans 8:38) So to rightly *fear the Lord* is to entirely surrender our existence to His limitless power and ravishing love. Saint John Chrysostom taught about the great boldness inherent in a new life in Christ: "We should rise up from the altar like lions breathing fire and striking terror into the hearts of demons."

My dear fellow disciples, empowered by all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, let us set about the task of winning the whole world for Christ and for His Kingdom. As has often been said, "we should not talk the talk unless we are willing to walk the walk." We are not true believers in Jesus unless we are willing to follow Jesus. The Lord will certainly move us, shake us up, and take us beyond ourselves. So always *fear the Lord* because He is God. Always prefer the Lord because He preferred nothing to us. Always hold on tenaciously to the Lord because we stand

before the invincible power of His Cross. Then purified and heart free, we should never rest, never retreat, never give up. *God Fearers*, know for certain that you will at last see your God face to face, possessing all that is good, knowing a blessedness that will never fail, a bliss and beatitude without limit, and a life without end. Amen.

+ Daniel R. Jenky r.s.c.

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Festival Letter 2019 – 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 18th, and the evening of Sunday, April 21st.

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 2019, will occur on the 6th 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.

The annual Chrism Mass, during which the priests renew their ministerial commitment, will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Tuesday of Holy Week, April 16th.

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 20th 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 7:43 P.M. CDT in Peoria (7:34 P.M. CDT in Danville and 7:48 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 28th 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 19th of April.

The Ascension of the Lord will be commemorated on Sunday, the 2nd of June, 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 9th 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 the Fifth Sunday of Easter, the 19th of May at 10:30 in the morning in the Cathedral, I will ordain a new transitional deacon for the Diocese of Peoria. On Saturday, the 25th of May at 10:30 in the morning, 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 a Priest. 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 2019.

In the Year of Our Lord 2019, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be celebrated on Tuesday, March 19th.

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

The Dedication of the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on the 15th of May and is a Solemnity in the Cathedral and a Feast in the Diocese.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated on Thursday, 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, is celebrated on Tuesday, the 27th of August, as a solemnity in the Shrine-Church.

The Feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, patroness of our diocesan vocations program, will be celebrated on Tuesday, the 1st of October. Prayers and activities in support of priestly vocations are encouraged to 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, is celebrated on Friday, the 1st of November. The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is observed on Saturday, the 2nd of November.

The Solemnity of Christ the King will be celebrated on Sunday, the 24th of November.

The Church will celebrate the beginning of the new liturgical year of grace and prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, the 1st of December, in the Year of Our Lord 2019.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary will be transferred to Monday, the 9th of December this year; this is the Patronal Feast of the Diocese of Peoria but is not a holy day of obligation this year.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas, is celebrated on Thursday, the 12th of December.

Christmas will be on Wednesday, the 25th of December.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is celebrated on Wednesday, the 1st of January in the Year of Our Lord 2020 and is a holy day of obligation.

To better enjoy the infinite treasury of merit won by our Divine Saviour, 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 2019 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:

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

March 24th to highlight the beginning of the growing season, associated with the Solemnity of the Annunciation

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

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

December 7th 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.