



**2021 Easter Message
from Most Rev. Richard Gagnon,
Archbishop of Winnipeg and
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia”

There is something unique about the Easter Liturgies, and that is, the reality of movement – not just activity, but a joyful movement of going forth – the Church that goes forth!

We certainly see this in the Gospel for Easter Sunday with Peter and John running towards the empty tomb, after Mary Magdalene had run to them with the news that the Lord was no longer in the tomb! We read again, in the same Gospel, that Mary encounters Jesus outside the tomb after Peter and John had hurried off and she, in turn, runs to tell the disciples: *“I have seen the Lord!”* Mary was not only the first disciple to see the risen Lord, but she was a missionary disciple - a running disciple - she is the Church that goes forth with a message of hope and joy!

It has now been over a year since the pandemic started. This past year has not been a time of going forth. Instead, it has been a time of lockdowns, restrictions, uncertainty, cancellations, disappointments, sickness and death. We have watched our church communities suffer in silence not knowing when our churches will be open or how long it will take for people to reconnect with their parishes. It has been a difficult time not only for people of faith but for the whole country as well. In spite of this, our Christian families continue to be places where faith lives and even flourishes.

Today, during this Easter season, we continue to struggle, but there is a new sense of hope with the vaccines now being distributed, an opening- up of the churches in many parts of the country and even the warmer weather after a long challenging winter.

Perhaps there is nothing as hopeful and meaningful in our faith celebrations as the Easter Vigil Mass when the new Paschal Candle is brought into the darkened church. The simple light is held high and shines brightly in the darkness as a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world. The congregation lights their small candles from the Easter Candle, one by one. The church becomes radiant and there is a sign of hope coming from each of us holding our lighted candles. The Paschal Candle moves down the aisle accompanied by the words: *Christ our Light -Thanks be to God*, echoing through the church.

Is this not a sign of what we are called to do as we move forward through this pandemic? Are we not called to be signs of hope as we re-build our communities following the destruction caused by the corona virus in the past year? In fact, we are on the very doorstep of a unique experience of church renewal. The lessons we have learned over the past year must play a part in this

renewal, especially how important, beautiful and valuable our faith really is; how vital the sacraments are to us; how hopeful the Word of God is to us. Is not our task to rebuild, to renew, to proclaim, to go out and be that light symbolized at the Easter Vigil? To be the post-pandemic Church!

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia”

This year, Pope Francis has given us St. Joseph to be our model and our inspiration. St. Joseph is the Protector of the Universal Church and our Patron Saint here in Canada. Can we turn to him more and more to help us in our great task of community building both in our Church and in the wider community? In his Apostolic Letter on St. Joseph, *Patris Corde*, the Holy Father reminds us that Joseph was a man of service, he knew the meaning of sacrifice and he placed himself at the service of the Messiah to protect him and help him grow. He writes: *“As the Lord had done with Israel, so Joseph did with Jesus: he taught him to walk, taking him by the hand; he was for him like a father, who raises an infant to his cheeks, bending down to him and feeding him”*. God chooses to work through the weak, as he did with Joseph and as he does with us, as we too place ourselves at the service of the Messiah in helping our communities to stand up and walk and to go forth!

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles for Easter Sunday, it is Peter who speaks and encourages the little Church, so weak in many ways, to go forth in both word and deed to be of service to salvation: *“You know the message that spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee...how Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power went about doing good and healing...He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God...”* We too must go out and gather our communities once again, and we must build them anew. But more than that, we must transcend our borders and reach out doing good in the wider community just as Christ did.

Recently, the Holy Father was in Iraq encouraging Christians to return and take up the task of rebuilding their communities—a work more difficult than ours. In Erbil, he celebrated Mass with 10,000 people and he commented on the Christians in Iraq who suffered so much yet were not hesitant to do works of charity in the wider community. The Pope said: *“Even amid great poverty and difficulty, many of you have generously offered concrete help and solidarity to the poor and the suffering. That is one of the reasons that led me to come as a pilgrim in your midst, to thank you and to confirm you in your faith and witness.”*

Like our Iraqi brothers and sisters, we must not forget the importance of our families as the place where the faith has been lived and nourished over the past year. This domestic Church is so very important for the wider Church community and the world and we must build upon the fruits that have blossomed over this pandemic period.

The Pope has also declared a *“Year of the Family, Amoris Laetitia”*. A year to focus on the *“Joy of Love”* that the family is meant to experience deeply. He is calling us to renew our pastoral commitment to place the family at the centre of the Church and society – a source of joy and generous love even in trials and difficulties.

This Easter, perhaps more than ever, there is good reason to be hopeful in our faith and to live a true Christian realism where we clearly acknowledge the reality of our present situation with all its lights and shadows. An Easter Faith means simply to believe that God's hand can be found everywhere and, in every event, however happy or sad, knowing, as St. Paul says: "*...that all things work together for good for those who love God*"

St. Joseph was a man who moved forward with a certain creative courage as the Pope reminds us in *Patris Corde*: "*The faith Christ taught us is what we see in St. Joseph. He did not look for shortcuts, but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it.*"

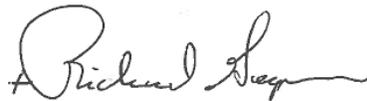
I wish to conclude this Easter message with the few words used by Pope Francis at the Mass in the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Bagdad, the place where 48 people were murdered by terrorists in 2010:

"...in the face of adversity, there are always two temptations-flight or anger. But these two approaches never fix anything. Jesus, on the other hand, changed history. How? With the humble power of love, with his patient witness. This is what we are called to do; and this is how God fulfils his promises."

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us rise and be on our way!

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia!

Wishing you and your loved ones, friends, family and communities a most blessed, healthy and graced Easter celebration.



+Richard Gagnon
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