

## Thoughts in the Time of COVID-19—#17, April 30, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Twenty-five years ago, I spent a year in Jerusalem. My friend, who also taught the Bible, was also on leave and stayed with his wife and two young sons at a research centre on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

One day, I went to visit them and their two young boys offered to give me a tour of the exhibit on life in biblical times that they had explored many times. So I saw how the people of that era pressed olives and made and stored wine. But the most memorable discovery for me was the enclosure for the sheep. The younger son explained to me how the people built the oval sheepfold with stones and to protect the sheep from predators and thieves. What was most intriguing to me was the final bit of his explanation, “so you see, Father Terry, once the shepherd has made sure the sheep are inside, he lies down in the opening to make sure the sheep are kept safe. His body blocks the doorway to prevent anyone getting in to harm the sheep.”

Wow! Now I understood the puzzling saying of Jesus in St. John’s Gospel this coming Sunday, where just before he tells us that he is the “good shepherd” Jesus says that “I am the door.” It also makes sense that Jesus says, “no one takes my life from me: I lay it down and take it up again” just as—each night—he lies down in the entrance to the sheepfold and each morning rises again to take up his service to his flock, to his people, to each one of us, to me. His action as the shepherd mimics his death on the cross out of love for all of humanity and his rising up in the resurrection to offer us new life from the moment of our baptism and every day afterwards. That’s what we are celebrating in these fifty days of the Easter season.

I mention how a youngster can teach an older member of the faith community to highlight that this is Catholic Education Week here in Ontario. Each year in Catholic Education Week, I would receive teachers and children from the French Catholic school board here in Ottawa where they would take part in a treasure hunt to “discover my cathedral”—“découvrir ma cathédrale.” I would tell them that Notre Dame cathedral belongs to all of them! Then, I would share words of encouragement and be lifted by their enthusiasm and joy.

With the English Catholic boards, our practice had been to celebrate in one of the schools of the Ottawa Catholic School Board or of the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario during the day. Then, on Tuesday evening, there would be a Mass at Notre Dame for all those who, after the Mass, would receive the Director’s award for outstanding service, a joy they would share with their families and friends. These teachers, personal assistants, caretakers, office staff got recognized for the kind of generous commitment that all who labour in our Catholic schools show day by day, year in and year out.

This year we are replacing that special gathering with a “virtual Mass,” which many will be able to take in with quiet prayer on Tuesday, May 5 at 10AM. Let’s thank God for our publicly-funded Catholic schools here in Ontario. We pray for all Catholic educators, support staff, trustees, parents, and students that we may continue to prepare our youth to be good citizens of Canada as well as joyful citizens of the Kingdom of God as has been the case for close to two hundred years in this Province.

I love celebrating Catholic Education week. It allows us to come to a deeper appreciation of the gift that Catholic Education is to our country. This year, Catholic Education Week focusses on the virtue of hope and how we are called to share hope with all students and staff. During this stressful time of the Coronavirus pandemic, students and staff members alike need the gift of hope.

God bless you.

✠ Terrence