



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF} MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR AUGUST 12, 2018

Dear friends in the Lord,

As a child I was spellbound by the U.S. space program. One of my keenest memories is the night of July 19, 1969: We were visiting my mother's mother in Connecticut for the month, and my brother and I were given permission to spend the night in front of Nana's big color TV (that in itself was a big deal in 1969!) to follow the Apollo 11 landing.

Six years ago last week brought me similar awe. I was enjoying a brief stay-cation, and I decided to stay up and watch the descent of the Mars rover Curiosity as it was streamed live from the NASA website. I had been following the mission since the rover's launch 8-1/2 months earlier, and I was fascinated by all the amazing and intricate engineering that would need to perform flawlessly for Curiosity to land on Mars safely. As the room full of scientists in Pasadena celebrated the successful landing at 10:30 p.m. that August night, I let out a whoop in my East Coast bedroom at 1:30 a.m.

This all came to mind two weeks ago, when Mars made its closest approach to Earth in 15 years. I attempted an early morning binocular viewing of the red planet, but it was too low on the horizon.

Space exploration touches me on a number of levels. I am awed by the vastness and mystery of God's creation. I celebrate human inquisitiveness and ingenuity, and I'm reminded of the words of St. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202 AD), "The glory of God is the human person fully alive."

Since one of the many scientific goals of the Mars rovers and orbiters is the search for life or for conditions that may once have supported life, the mission necessarily raises important questions of theological anthropology. One of the joys of the Catholic tradition is that, at its best, it is a rational tradition. As Brother Guy Consolmagno, S.J., the director of the Vatican Observatory, noted in a recent interview, "We are not afraid of science.... We are not afraid of the truth."

Notwithstanding the dreadful recent suggestion that the U.S. space program should be militarized, I maintain a strong hope that space exploration will continue to benefit the common human good in many peaceful ways.

Your brother in Christ's word and work,