



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF} MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR MAY 19, 2019

Dear friends in the Risen Lord,

I was saddened last week to learn of the death at age 90 of Jean Vanier, the Canadian Catholic philosopher, theologian and founder of L'Arche. As a young priest, I heard Vanier speak at Harvard, in lectures that would later be published as *From Brokenness to Community*. I count his words on that occasion, and the brief encounter with the man many now consider a saint, as among the most formative moments of my ministry.

Vanier's wisdom was rooted in experience. Born a child of privilege (his father was Governor General of Canada), he left home at age 13 to join the British navy at a time when Nazi submarines were sinking one out of every three British boats. In 1950, he resigned his commission to go to college. As a student in Paris, Vanier joined Eau Vive ("Living Waters"), a spiritual community founded by the Dominican priest Thomas Philippe. After earning a doctorate in moral philosophy, Vanier returned to Canada to begin his career as a scholar.

But his life changed course again when he returned to France in 1963 to visit his old spiritual mentor. Father Philippe was then serving as chaplain for about thirty people with intellectual disabilities at an institution in the French village of Trosly Breuil. Philippe urged Vanier to "do something" for people with developmental disabilities. One year later, in 1964, Vanier invited two men with disabilities to live with him in a house in Trosly Breuil. Vanier called their home L'Arche ("The Ark").

Today there are over 140 L'Arche communities in some 35 countries—including L'Arche Atlanta, with which several of our parishioners and other friends of mine are active. L'Arche homes operate on a "community model"—six to eight people, with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life together. "The secret of L'Arche," Vanier once said, "is relationships: meeting people, not through the filters of certitudes, ideologies, idealism or judgments, but heart to heart, listening to people with their pain, their joy, their hope, their history, listening to their heartbeats."

Please join me in praying that Jean Vanier's great heart may rest in peace.

