



# IMMACULATE HEART<sup>OF</sup>MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR JULY 21, 2019

Dear friends in the Lord,

I've confessed to you in the past my love affair with books. I wish that I could report that storing 40 heavy book boxes in my office since my arrival four years ago—or the prospect of moving them all into the new rectory next month—had weakened my inordinate attachment to the things, but... no. The list of new books I want to read and classics I want to re-read seems endless. I blame the addiction on my mother, who read to me every night when I was a toddler. (Parents, beware: you might be creating a monster!)

Goëthe wrote that one “should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul.” My first spiritual director's advice wasn't very different: always to be reading one good book on scripture or theology or spirituality, and at the same time—and sometimes even more important—a novel, to make sure that the religious imagination remains connected to the stuff of ordinary life. That counsel has served me well over the years.

Friends and parishioners often ask me what I'm reading. These are the books at my bedside right now: *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America* by Daniel Okrent is a sad story of the triumph of ignorance in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During that time immigration from Europe increased many-fold, and much of it was of Catholics and Jews from southern and eastern Europe. Parts of the political establishment feared being outnumbered by these “undesirables,” and eventually joined forces with the growing junk science of eugenics in order to justify keeping lesser “races” out of America. I need not add that the book is a cautionary tale for us in the present day.

And in preparation for next year's Holy Land pilgrimage, I'm re-reading *From the Holy Mountain* by William Dalrymple. In the spring of the year 587, the monks John Moschos and his pupil Sophronius embarked on a remarkable expedition from the shores of Bosphorus to the sand dunes of Egypt. Dalrymple retraces the footsteps of these monks, creating a moving elegy to the slowly dying civilization of Eastern Christianity and the people who are struggling to keep its flame alive.

Priests in religious orders, who take the vow of poverty, used to write in their books “*Ad usum*,” meaning that they did not “own” the book, but that it was merely for their “use.” I like that idea—and it helps assuage the guilt of “using” so very many books! But it also means that I'm happy to share. If I write or preach about a book that piques your interest, just let me know, and I'll gladly pass it along.

Your brother in Christ's word and work,