

WILL THE ASHES OF NOTRE DAME LEAD TO FAITH RENEWAL?

Notre Dame is burning! Will the ashes of Notre Dame lead to faith renewal? The whole world watched Notre Dame burning last Monday, the first day of the 2019 **Holy Week**: for long hours, people in the streets of Paris and throughout the world were watching anxiously the most famous and oldest Cathedral of the world go down in flames. At long last (midnight Paris time), the fire was contained and despite the total destruction of the tall spire dominating the whole structure and a collapse of the roof, **Notre Dame is still standing**.

I love **Notre Dame**. It is one of my favorite churches. Though I spent my childhood and adolescence near Lourdes in Southern France, I spent five wonderful years of graduate school in Paris. I lived within walking distance of Notre Dame. I loved the 15-minute walk along St Michel Boulevard before crossing the bridge over the Seine River leading to the Cathedral. I loved praying within such a beautiful church and enjoyed the Sunday organ recitals (free of charge!). Since then, I returned many times, including pilgrimages as a seminarian and then as a priest. The last time was in August 2017 when I led a OLHOC pilgrimage to Fatima and Marian sites in France.

From Ashes to new life! As we celebrated the **Triduum** at OLHOC, I reflected on what good could come out of this disastrous fire. **Would the ashes of Notre Dame lead to new life, to a renewal of faith?** Would Notre Dame be rebuilt exactly as it was standing for the last 800 years? While Notre Dame is closed during reconstruction (a minimum of five years), would pilgrimages or outside processions/masses lead a spiritual renewal? Would the new Notre Dame, emerging from the Ashes become a new, stronger Marian Site of devotion and miracles like the Miraculous Medal Chapel in Paris, La Salette in the Alps, or Lourdes in Southern France? I believe those three major apparitions of Mary in France in the 19th century were the result of the French Revolution's destruction of many churches and persecution/killing of priests and religious.

There were some early good news: 1. By a miracle nobody was injured (although over 2,000 people were inside the building and hundreds of firefighters had to intervene). 2. Within six hours the fire could be contained while thousands of people prayed outside and sang Marian Hymns 3. A fire brigade chaplain Fr. Jean-Marc Fournier was able to rescue the Blessed Sacrament and the famous relic of Jesus' Crown of Thorns, reminding us of the Triduum: we believe (the Apostles Creed) that after his Passion, Death (wearing a crown of thorns) and Burial, Jesus descended into hell and on the third day he rose again from the dead. There were many comments about the rescue of relics and the Blessed Sacrament. In an interview on television, Fr. Fournier described these agonizing moments. He felt that he was in hell surrounded by raging flames. Alone (all

firefighters had been asked to evacuate the church as the collapse of the roof was imminent) he tried to protect the Blessed Sacrament- Body of Christ contained in one of the tabernacles from the fire. The church was totally empty when he finally was able to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament, and he still chose to give a Blessing/Benediction asking Jesus to protect the church consecrated to His mother. This reminded me that in recent homilies I have emphasized the importance of coming to Mass to have an encounter with God. Here it is the opposite: the burning of Notre Dame led to Christ coming out the flames to encounter all people outside Notre Dame. We can all meditate on this image.

The ashes remind us of our human fragility that we are dust and to dust we shall return (Ash Wednesday). The fire reminds us of Jesus saying " Destroy this temple (Jerusalem) and in three days I will rebuild it" (John 2:19). We know that Jesus referred to the temple as being His own body and to His anticipated Resurrection. The Blessed Sacrament rescued out of the flames reminds us of His Real Presence in the Eucharist and of His Resurrection. The fire also reminds us of our Baptism celebrated at Easter Vigil through the words of St Paul to the Romans (6:3-11) "*We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, just as Christ was raised from the dead ...we too might live in newness of life ... You must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus*".

Once more, we had a wonderful Triduum at OLHOC. Your active participation is a blessing to our parish. We can all be grateful to God for the talent and the generous **gifts** from so many of our volunteers: the Altar Guild, the Music Ministry, the Youth Ministry, the Lectors, Ushers, Greeters, Altar Servers, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. I am also grateful to God for the clergy and staff that help me greatly in carrying out my responsibilities as your pastor.

The fire of Notre Dame of Paris should bring **hope** in new life to all of us. Like people in Paris, each of us needs a spiritual renewal. We need the Fire of the Holy Spirit to clean our hearts of sinfulness and fill them with Joy, Peace, and Love. Come Holy Spirit! Help each of us to walk these 50 days of Easter Season (ending with Pentecost June 9) with open hearts! Help us to be ready to receive the Infinite Love and Mercy of Jesus! Help us to have a true conversion of heart! Come Holy Spirit! Help transform the hearts of our 51 youth who received the Sacrament of Confirmation on Friday April 26. Help each of us to proclaim with confidence on this **Sunday of Divine Mercy: Jesus I trust in you!**

*One in Christ,
Father Alain*