



JESUIT SPIRITUAL RENEWAL CENTRE IN PICKERING

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GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MANRESA



We are living through an unprecedented crisis because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. There is an endless list of prayer intentions for all of us to hold in our hearts at this time: those who have been infected, those suffering from isolation and being more housebound than even usual, the women and men in our nursing homes, the millions who are deprived of the strength that they receive from the Eucharist, those affected by either temporary or permanent unemployment, those who are physically or mentally vulnerable, the health care workers who are playing heroic roles and risking their own health, and so on. To describe our global situation as overwhelming is an understatement. I'm not able to do much, but I assure you that the intentions of our Manresa family are part of my daily prayer and celebration of the Eucharist. There are few of us who can do much, but we can take care of ourselves and our loved ones. We can find some solace in joining with others in prayer.

As most of you know, or assume, Manresa programs have been suspended for the foreseeable future. We have posted the following message on our doors.

As a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), we at Manresa have therefore suspended all our scheduled retreats until further notice, awaiting further directions from medical authorities. Let us pray for all those who are physically affected by this virus and for those whose employment is affected by these measures, especially, those who are struggling financially.

This brief newsletter does offer a piece of good news about retreat weekends offered this winter by the Sisters of Life, and Fr. Philip Shano offers a piece to nourish your souls at this point. He offers a few thoughts about our fears in this period. I'm sure that most of you are aware of some of the many online resources that are available to help your spiritual life.

Stay safe and healthy. God bless!

Fr. Henk

A MESSAGE FROM THE SISTERS OF LIFE

"The Sisters of Life were blessed to host two recent retreats on the beautiful grounds and kind service found at Manresa!"

As Sisters of Life, we are a Religious Community of women who are in love with Love – Love incarnate, crucified, and Risen – and captivated by the truth of the beauty of every human person, created in God's image and likeness. We believe every person is valuable and sacred. We believe that every person is good, loved, unique and unrepeatable, and that every person's life has deep meaning, purpose and worth.



One of our missions is hosting weekend retreats, which have led us to the grounds of Manresa, where we are able to give women the time to step out of the busy-ness of ordinary life to encounter the love, peace, and mercy of Jesus in a new way. Our retreats include time for silent prayer, Eucharistic adoration, Holy Mass, opportunities for confession, and conferences given by the Sisters. This past February we hosted two weekend retreats, one for Young Women and a second for Women of all ages. Both retreats were full, with every bed taken!

In addition to hosting retreats, our missions include: serving women who are vulnerable to abortion, giving them the support and resources to be able to choose life for themselves and their children; evangelization, sharing the message of the beauty of life and love; outreach to college and university students; a ministry of accompaniment for women who have suffered after abortion to encounter the mercy and healing of Jesus Christ."

<https://sistersoflife.org/where-we-are/toronto/>

FOOD FOR YOUR SOUL: COVID-19 AND PERSONAL FEAR

Flattening the curve. Self-isolation. Social distancing. Tele-commuting. Herd immunity. We are hearing a few new terms at this time. We are living with an unprecedented situation, one that has serious repercussions for almost every area of our lives – whether personal, familial, ecclesial, Eucharistic, communal, academic, work, financial, physical and mental and spiritual health, sports and entertainment and shopping, and just about everything in our life.

Like many of you, I've never thought of myself as an unusually fearful person. I have a fear of things such as spiders, snakes and heights. I only experience a normal level of anxiety. I've written so often with quotes from Jesus about not being afraid. I have often spoken about fearlessness in homilies. I've given spiritual direction and classes to countless people where I remind people of that call to let go of anxiety and fear. But this – COVID 19 – has unleashed something different in me, and, I suspect, most others. Why? I suppose that the rational part of me can tell myself that I am just a victim of the mass hysteria that is sweeping the globe. There is certainly something to be said for that. Is our constant supply of news and updates and advisories and cancellations making things worse? Probably, but there is still an inner fear. I've become almost obsessed about things like door handles, taps, keyboards, and the like. Is it irrational? Is it because I'm over 60, and, therefore, among those that are more at risk than the younger? Is it because a religious community is more difficult to keep clean and consistent than a family home?

There are plenty out there with spiritual advice in this dangerous time. You have probably heard of, or read Fr. James Martin's excellent piece from *AMERICA* magazine:

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/03/13/faith-time-coronavirus>

It's normal for us to experience anxiety. What is unusual is to recognize this as the new normal way for the entire world. We have hope that it will pass in time and we can start adjusting to a new way of life, something resembling the world we used to feel comfortable in. But, for this period, what is the solution? It's almost trite to say, *fear not*. I think that we are being called to a deeper level of spiritual depth, one where we truly let nothing disturb us as we take as many precautions as possible. Let's start by naming our areas of fear and recognize what it is that it is most disturbing us. We may be banned from gatherings over a certain number, but nothing is preventing us from reaching out to others in ways that we know are safe. Let's maintain a sense of humour. Indeed, there are many humorous stories at this time. Let's show our fear that we have control over it. I can't control the virus or the weather, but I can determine what my reaction will be. Even if you can't be calm, be strong and carry on.

By Philip Shano, S.J.