

## January 6, 2019 - The Joy of Spiritual Renewal!

I pray that we are all entering the New Year 2019 with a New Spirit! I pray to God that together as a “family of families” at OLHOC, we can all put behind whatever difficulties we may have faced individually and collectively in the last 12 months. **Every year is a new beginning, a spiritual life!** I received positive feedback on the emphasis put this year on **hope and spiritual renewal!** These are not just words. They are the reality of a truly Christian life! St. Paul put it so well when he wrote to the Philippians: **“Brothers and Sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always, I shall say it again: Rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your request known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:47). We heard this beautiful message on **Gaudete** Sunday (third Sunday of Advent), the Sunday of **Joy!** I have kept hearing this message right now through **His spirit!** We are never alone. God’s greatest **gift** to us today is the **gift** of the presence of Jesus’s spirit within us, within our own hearts! This is the **gift of love**, the **gift** of the Father’s **unconditional love** for each one of us! We are all different and have different relationships with Jesus. To be Christian is to have a personal encounter with our Lord Jesus! I pray to God that the New Year 2019 will be an opportunity of spiritual renewal for each of us and for our parish as a whole! It is all about **Jesus Christ! He is our hope, our only hope! He is our peace, our only peace! He is our joy! He is our love!**

What do we mean by spiritual renewal? It is a renewal of our personal relationship with Jesus. How can one achieve such renewal? We cannot do it alone. Alone, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible. We all have received the graces of the Holy Spirit at our Baptism and Confirmation. We recall the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit received through the Sacrament of Confirmation: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. Yes, we have received these gifts and they are imprinted on our hearts, but we need to activate them, we need to have the strongest desire to make use of them, we need to let the Holy Spirit Himself take over our choices and decisions, we need to let go of our selfishness and our self-centeredness. Is this easy? Not at all. It is a daily conversion where little by little we can let our ego decrease and let Christ increase (His Spirit) in our hearts: Trust in Jesus and put him first. St. Paul could say: “I have been crucified with Christ; yet, I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 19-20). How do we know whether we make progress in our spiritual renewal? In the same way we assess the value of a tree by its fruits, we can assess our progress by the extent to which we manifest in our own lives some of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control. We cannot buy those fruits in the marketplace, they come to us only as a result of the extent to which we let the **Holy Spirit** invade our hearts and guide our daily choices and decisions.

Last Tuesday, we celebrated Mary, Mother of God (always first day of the year) and were reminded of the unique position of Mary in Heaven. She is the only human being who was never stained by sin so as to be able to bear in her womb the **Son of God**, who as the second person in the Holy Trinity, is God Himself. We were also reminded during Advent that **Mary is also the spouse of the Holy Spirit**. By imitating the virtues of Mary (especially Faith, Obedience, Humility), we can also achieve our Spiritual Renewal as Mary always leads us to Jesus! Today, we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, and we can associate our spiritual lives with the long journey of the Magi who were also seeking to encounter the newborn King of the Jews, whom we know as Jesus. When following Jesus’ star, they were **overjoyed** when the star stopped over the place where they could see the child Jesus with Mary, his mother. Like the Magi, our spiritual journey is to keep seeing the presence of Jesus in our lives. Do you feel today the **joy** of the **Magi**? Can you feel the joy of spiritual renewal today?

May God keep blessing each one of us and our families. May God help each of us to open our hearts to receiving fully the graces of the Holy Spirit and may Mary also accompany us and lead us to a new encounter with her son Jesus!

One in Christ,  
*Fr. Alain*