

LOVE. TEACH. HEAL.

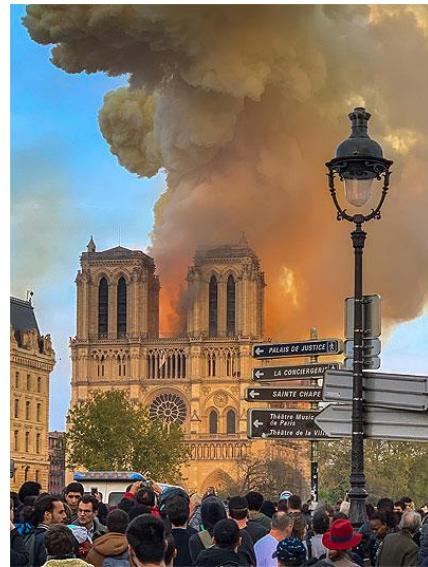
Our Mission Guided by the Love of Jesus Christ

Reflections on the Notre Dame Cathedral Fire

April 16, 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

Late yesterday a fire broke out in an attic of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, and quickly engulfed the roof, most of which collapsed into the nave. At this writing, the full extent of the damage to the Cathedral's interior is unknown. Thankfully, it appears that most of the stonework, including the towers with their massive bells, is still structurally sound.



Notre Dame is more than a church. She is the heart of Paris and the mother of France, synonymous with the Blessed Virgin to whom she is dedicated. Though practicing Catholics are a minority in Paris these days, they love their Mother with a devotion that survives. Tens of thousands packed the streets as the Cathedral was in flames, most in silent prayer, or singing hymns many of them had not sung since childhood. The heart has a way of reaching past the mind toward God.

I know many in Pittsburgh have strong ties to France, as do my family and I. As a young soldier in World War I, my grandfather, wounded and sick, was sheltered for several weeks behind enemy lines by a French family who nursed him back to health, hiding him at the risk of their lives. As a young woman volunteering at a hospital in Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1940, my mother, I am sure, prayed in Notre Dame for the protection of Paris in the face of the German advance, and later for the liberation of the country she loved. I first walked through the doors of the Cathedral as a child of age six, prayed there for guidance and vocation as a man of twenty-one, and have returned many times since.

Notre Dame is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a beacon for Christians across the globe. She is also the home of a reliquary supposed to contain Christ's crown of thorns, which appears now to be safe and unharmed. Please pray in solidarity with our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers in the coming days, but especially with the churches and people of France, that the prayers of this Holy Week may reassure us all of the power of God, who works through loss to raise the dead, who brings light out of darkness, and strikes the fires of hope in the midst of desolation.

Faithfully your bishop,



(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh



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