

**"Upon Reflection . . . " A Message from Fr. Gordon  
17 April 2019**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Scripture warns us not to mistake the physical structure of a church or a place of worship for the true and active devotion we owe to God. 'The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands,' declares Stephen in Acts 7:48. And the author of First Peter reminds us that we are 'living stones built into a spiritual house to be a priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (2:5).

While recalling these biblical warnings, it was still with heartbreaking sadness that I watched, along with the rest of the world, the news pictures of the destruction by fire of glorious Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Although as I write the immense damage appears to have been halted and most of the fire contained, the charred shell that was the inner cathedral stands in painful contrast to the stunning edifice completed during the Middle Ages and having served as one of the symbols of Paris ever since.

In a time when most of the populace could not read and when mortality rates were exceedingly high, Notre Dame (as did the other great cathedrals across Europe) communicated the message of faith through soaring stone and brilliant stained glass, its very size and majesty giving the worshipper a foretaste of the grandeurs of heaven. It was a tangible, outward symbol of a deeper desire to become closer to God. And the genius that went into its construction, in addition to the tireless work that spanned generations, served as a testament to God-inspired human endeavor, patience, and skill.

President Macron of France has pledged the nation to a complete rebuilding campaign, and donations in the millions have already been set aside. I applaud those efforts and that pledge. Honestly, one cannot imagine Paris without Notre Dame!

But the work of re-building should not be simply a matter of national pride or even of that aesthetic desire (so much a part of our human character) to preserve a great work of art. The millions poured into the restoration must be matched in kind to support relief efforts around the world the labors of countless 'living stones' who each day seek to bring nourishment and peace to persons and populations whose own lives are like burned-out shells and for whom the walls of hope have crumbled.

Only when this second 're-building' takes place, it seems to me, will the restored magnificence of the cathedral in Paris truly and once again serve its original purpose as an earthly means of bringing the world closer to heaven. For then the cry of 'Sanctuary!' once invoked by Victor Hugo's famous bell-ringer in the novel Notre-Dame de Paris will not only echo from its towers and through its chancel but will reverberate in the hearts of refugees and outcasts across the globe, of persecuted, suffering souls of every land whom God in Christ calls us to protect and succor and love.

Beaucoup de Benedictions (Many Blessings),  
Fr. Gordon +