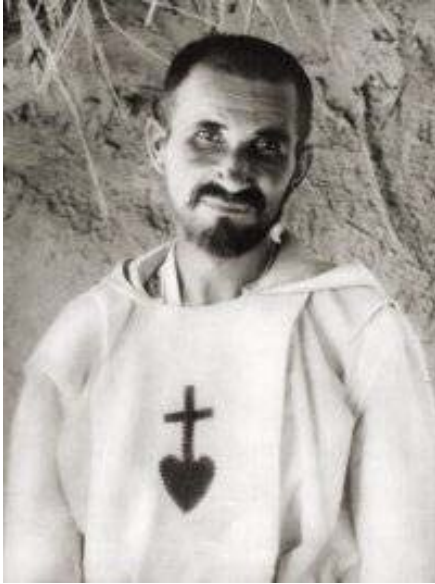


Dear Brothers and Sisters



Blessed Charles De Foucauld

Today the parishes in the Archdiocese are open for Sunday Mass for the first time in three months. This has been a particularly hard time for all of us, and has caused some to be critical of the decision to lock the church doors. As we open today, with a renewed appreciation for the gift of the Eucharist, I am reminded of the life and testimony of one of the greatest spiritual writers of our time, Carlo Carretto, who died aged 78 in 1988.

For ten years he lived the desert life of silence, solitude and prayer in the Sahara Desert, before returning to Italy and settling in Umbria where thousands of people sought his counsel and direction. His books on prayer and contemplation, which have helped so many people - perhaps his most famous being "Letters from The Desert"- continue to be published and read today.

In 1984 he wrote his "Spiritual Testament", which ends with an extraordinary "love letter" addressed to the institutional Church. In this letter he says:

*"How much I criticize you, my Church, but yet how much I love you!*

*You have made me suffer more than anyone. And yet I owe you more than I owe any other person.*

*I should like to see you destroyed. But I need your presence.*

*You have caused me so much scandal. And yet you alone have taught me to understand the true meaning of holiness.*

*Never in the world have I seen anything more hypocritical, more compromised. Yet never have I touched anything more pure, generous and lovely.*

*Countless times I have wanted to slam the door of my soul in your face; yet every night I pray to die in your arms.*

*No! I cannot be free of you; I cannot leave you, for I am one with you - even though not completely one.*

*But if I leave, where should I go? What would I do? Build another Church?*

*But I cannot build another Church without the same defects. Why? Because they are MY defects too.*

*And again, if I were to build another Church, it would be MY Church and not Christ's Church..."*

Carlo Carretto experienced the Church as he experienced himself: flawed, yet divine, able to reveal the amazing love and mercy of God, and able to obscure it and destroy it too.

Perhaps this is your experience also? Perhaps you could write a similar "love letter"? Remember this when you attend Mass today.

Fr. Sean