



November 2016

Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Rom 12:12)

As I approach 20 years of priesthood, my admiration for St Paul continues to grow. He fulfilled his own, divinely inspired, standard of “speaking the truth in love,” (Eph 4:15), which serves as our standard for Courage and EnCourage. He humbly admitted his moral weakness: “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” (Rom 7:19) He enflashed this profound teaching of the Gospel: “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (II Cor 12:10)

St Paul is an exemplary and unique figure in the history of Christianity. But though he possessed the special grace of an Apostle, he was first a disciple, one of the “brethren” under the same “Master”, who learned his lessons well, and often in suffering and hardship. So with deep charity, he shared the “secret,” if you will, of the Christian life, with an economy of words: “Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” These are words of charity, to be sure, from a man who understood well the tangle of the human heart and the challenge of a fallen world. But they are also words grounded in *faith*, in a firm conviction, that God is good, that nothing falls outside His providence or the reach of His grace, and “that in everything God works for good with those who love Him.” (Rom 8:28)

This is my last annual appeal letter, a task, which for nine years, has been a happy labor: part sermon, part fundraiser. I recall some golden advice I received from my spiritual director when, as a newly ordained deacon in 1996 I was preparing to give a homily to Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity for the first time, and had *no idea* what I could possibly say to them. Father wisely said, “**You can offer them ... encouragement.**” And that is my hope here: to offer you encouragement from the wisdom of St Paul, to believe that if you have faith in Jesus Christ, like St Paul, you can do “all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:13)

Saints are not superheroes with special powers to defy moral gravity, leap insuperable spiritual heights with a single bound, or outrun human frailty. Their “power” lies in their faith in the Lord and in His promises to those whom He called His “friends.” Simply put, saints *really trust* in these words of Jesus: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life...your heavenly Father knows [your needs]...But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” (Mt 6:25, 32, 33) This is a divine promise, and God always keeps His promises!

Each day, I want to do more than admire St Paul. With God’s grace, I want to *imitate his faith*, and I urge you to pray to do the same, because that is where we will find the strength of the saints, a strength especially needed today to remain steadfast in what the Church teaches us about Christ and about ourselves. When we pray the Creed, we say that we “believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church,” which means, not that we believe that the Church exists in the world—that does not require faith—but that the Church gives us the grace, mercy and peace of Jesus Christ, by bringing Him to us in Sacred Scripture, in the Sacraments, and in the Church’s magisterial teaching. Opinion polls, cultural trends and even terrible changes in the civil law do not shake the conviction of those “who are called to be saints” in the veracity of these things. (Rom 1:7)

Are we at a disadvantage because we have not seen Jesus as Paul and the other Apostles did? **The Lord does not think so.** Do you recall His words to the “doubting Thomas”? “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (Jn 20:29) And with great tenderness, the Master left us in the care of His Mother, who will intercede for us most powerfully. Remember that Elizabeth praised Mary for her *faith*. “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Lk 1:45)

I am sincerely grateful for the abundant graces I have received during the past nine years. I have been edified by the faith and perseverance of so many members of our Courage and EnCourage family, by the spiritual fatherhood of our chaplains, and by the generosity of our donors. Thank you for encouraging me by your example to strive to be a more faithful disciple and priest. I express my heartfelt gratitude to the members of our episcopal board and board of directors, and in particular to our **extraordinary central office staff**, and all of our part-time helpers and volunteers. May the Good God reward all of you.

For the apostolate, 2016 has been another wonderful year, rich in challenges and opportunities, and **fruitful in grace**. Our annual summer conference at Catholic University of America was the largest ever, with more than 425 people participating. We added a sixth full-time member of the central office staff, Rossana Goñi, from the Marian Community of Reconciliation or *Fraternas*. I am happy to report that Tina—who served as Fr Harvey’s assistant for 10 years—will be returning to part-time work. We continue the search for a full-time, onsite communications director.

As most of you know, Courage and EnCourage will be in exceptionally capable hands when **Fr Philip Bochanski** becomes our third executive director on January 1. Father has served the apostolate very well for the past two years as our associate director, in both catechetical formation and pastoral ministry. I have a great sense of peace as I look forward to the next chapter in the life of the apostolate under his care, and to continuing my service as a member of the board of directors.

You can help Father in a very practical way, right now. While the episcopal board continues the national search for two more priests for the central office, Fr Bochanski will be dividing his time among catechesis, ministry, administration, and fundraising. A successful end-of-year campaign will allow Father to keep his attention on the most important work of clergy formation and that of establishing or strengthening chapters of Courage and EnCourage throughout the country and around the world.

So, with faith in the goodness of God and with confidence in our donors, I invite you to write a check today for **\$250, \$500, \$1,000**, or even more, so that we do not lose any of the momentum with which we have been blessed in recent times. God bless you and thank you.

(r) P-m. CU

Fr. Paul N. Check
Executive Director