



1 April 2020

Dear Pastors, Pastoral Assistants and Parishioners,

As I look back at my letter of March 1st, I see that I spoke at that time of the coronavirus, and some very rudimentary practices that at that time were being widely recommended. During the past month, the impact of this situation has become much more dire, and has had a profound effect on us all. We have had to cease all public celebrations of Mass and other sacraments that, at latest count, gather more than 15 people.

Holy Week and the Easter Triduum

It is now obvious that with the present limitations, our celebrations of Holy Week are affected this year. We will not be able to gather for the Holy Week celebrations. Most notable among these are Palm Sunday, the Chrism Mass (which we always hold on Tuesday of Holy Week), Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. While your parish priest will be celebrating these, he cannot have a congregation of the faithful with him. Msgr. Charles Lavoie recently sent to your priests some instructions on how to celebrate these rituals. They will be simpler, of course, because the priest will have no congregation with him in the church. The Chrism Mass will have to be celebrated at a later date, still to be determined. It is my hope that when this does occur, it will be as a jubilant celebration of our return to "normal life".

This has all been very painful. First of all, we have had to realize how very serious this matter is, not only as individuals but as a nation and the global community. We have had to adjust to constantly changing restrictions, especially in how we relate to one another and to the world at large. The economy, is suffering, as many people fear for their jobs. My own doctor put me on two weeks of isolation; even as this is being lifted, I must observe all the recommended practices. For people of faith, we have felt deprived of full participation at both weekend and weekday Masses. Televised Masses have become a mainstay for most of us.

Some Learnings

The past month has afforded me the time to reflect on a number of truths and mysteries:

The centrality of faith. There is a call in all of this for us to rely on the Lord, to be in touch with Jesus in the midst of our pain and fear. For once, we have had to live without ready access to the Sacraments. Yet in other times and places, this has been and continues to be the norm. There

are many examples in history of people being deprived of priests and other Church ministers, but they've not lost their faith in Jesus and His Church! I think of the Japanese and Korean Catholic communities after the expulsion of the missionaries who fed them with the Word of God and the Church's sacraments. Centuries later, other missionaries were surprised to encounter strong Catholic communities who persevered for centuries, on their own. Some people have spoken to me of their concern that we will lose our faith if we don't get to Mass every Sunday. While we must indeed seek to satisfy our religious hunger and thirst, we only lose our faith if by our choice we turn away from what the Lord offers us.

The value of life. We all want to live, and life's value is not found only in our physical health, important though that is. We have emotional and psychological needs, and we have a spiritual life. Many have expressed deep gratitude for health workers, recognizing that in this pandemic, they face a singular risk of catching this virus as they minister to others. Health practitioners make tremendous sacrifices in the pursuit of the good health of us all.

The importance of community. We realize as rarely before how much we long to be with others. Given the restrictions imposed on us, many have formed networks that seek to assist those in need. We are brought together in our need; we feel our common humanity, which draws us out of our own lives into the needs of others. We take personally our being a community, a province, a nation and a global community as never before. We are all in this together. I am indeed my brother's/sister's keeper.

The value of family and home. We have heard some heart-warming stories of families putting a positive face on their time enclosed at home – and they love it. In our otherwise busy lives, we have little time for one another. But in the present climate, families are gathering around cooking and baking, games and home movies. While classes in schools have been cancelled, teachers in our school districts continue to do an awesome job in providing on-line instruction for their pupils. At the same time, parents are called on to be teachers – which is in accord with what our Church proclaims about parents being the first teachers of their children.

On Friday last, March 27th, Pope Francis gave an *urbi et orbi* (to the city and to the world) message from the steps of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. Addressing God, the Holy Father prayed "it is not the time of *your* judgment, but of *our* judgment: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others." Well said, Your Holiness!



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