

PASTOR'S CORNER

Plague Journal 2 April 3, 2020

From day to day, as the Spirit moves me, I will share with you certain theological reflections concerning the liturgy and its relation to the times we're in.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29: For reasons which I don't understand, though Priests can say Mass without an assembly, they are encouraged to do so with at least a server and a lector present. Obviously that is not advisable under these circumstances. So I continue to pray the Holy Mass alone. The Mass said is of course still a valid one, though as a result all the lonelier. From now on I have decided to pray all my Masses in the chapel and reserve the use of the church proper for the happy day when we can all return somewhat to normal as we gather together again as a community to celebrate the death and resurrection of the Lord.

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is the central action which builds up the Body of Christ. That action continues even when the Priest is alone at Mass, but without a doubt it lacks a certain practical efficacy since you all are not there with me. As I am discovering, there is a loneliness to this kind of Mass that points out just how much of a communal action it is meant to be. It would not be an exaggeration to say that I very much miss your presence! Not just personally, but together in worship amidst all the sometimes noisy chaos that can mean.

The coronavirus has had the effect of closing the Mass in upon itself. First, the cups went, then the sign of peace, then the kids as altar servers, then the Priest (himself in the risk group) was pulled from the communion line. Finally, the rule of 250, followed so very briefly by the rule of 10. Now the rule of zero: all Masses are closed to the public. I'm not at all convinced that this was the right decision to make, but it was without doubt a tough one.

With President Trump's decision to place the country on a shut-down through April 30, it seems very likely that the first time we might conceivably meet again at Mass is mid to late May. It seems unbelievable that the entirety of Easter could come and go without one St. Therese community Mass! Pray that somehow this is not so.

Tuesday March 31: Having been raised from the dead by Jesus, Lazarus will nonetheless die again. His resuscitation is not at all a resurrection to eternal life. In fact, as the object of a miraculous act, Lazarus himself was not even "born again" into a new life as you and I were in baptism. Lazarus was returned to life through the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he alone who is the resurrection and the life. This action tells us much about the identity of Jesus but nothing about Lazarus (other than that he was sick and died and then was raised for a time only to die again.) For us today Lazarus, like his sisters, is dead and gone. He did not escape death; rather, his demise was only delayed.

All of the fear escalating around this epidemic finds its source in our fear of death. Oftentimes you hear our new reality described as a “time of uncertainty”. In truth there are few things as certain as death! Without doubt everyone now alive will die. We are all in the high risk group and the mortality rate is 100%. Since the Fall of mankind, no one can enter into eternal life without dying. Even Jesus had to die. Keeping this central fact of life on earth in mind always alleviates fear. This is because our fear is a ‘fight-or-flight’ response to something that can in all truth be neither fought nor fled from. The rational nature of the matter allows us to step outside of our animal skins and know the balm of truth.

This reality of our situation is an invitation to deepen our faith in Jesus Christ who alone can usher us into a post-death reality where death and disease is no more. I invite you all to get off of the treadmill of survival and spend your time and energy more profitably in prayer and study. This current crisis will end and most of us will survive it. What, I wonder, will we have to show for this Lenten time of grace which the Lord has seen fit to grant unto us?

Friday April 3: Today I prayed the *Mass in Time of Pandemic* which was just released by the Holy See. I would recommend to you the two readings for your prayer and reflection: Lam 3.17-26 and Mark 4.35-41. The Gospel reading is the same one upon which Pope Francis based his reflection last Friday while at prayer in St. Peter’s square.

Let me conclude this entry by sharing with you the Collect of the Mass:

Almighty and eternal God,
our refuge in every danger,
to whom we turn in our distress;
in faith we pray:
Look with compassion upon the afflicted,
grant eternal rest to the dead, comfort to mourners,
healing to the sick, peace to the dying,
strength to healthcare workers, wisdom to our leaders
and the courage to reach out to all in love,
so that together we may give glory to your holy name.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Holy Week begins Sunday with the celebration of Palm Sunday.