

March 25, 2020

Dear Parish Family,

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God." (2 Corinthians 1: 2-4)

I want to reach out to you to let you know that all of you are in my heart and prayers during this most unprecedented time. While I have been posting messages on the parish's Facebook page, I know that there are those of you who are not members of this means of interacting with others. If you are, please check the page every day. Along with a message from me every now and then, there is a great deal of other information to assist you in prayer and reflection, both individually, and with your families. Especially, know that we are live-streaming weekday Mass each day at 12:00 p.m. We are then putting the Mass on the Facebook page and on the parish website, www.svdpparish.org, so that we may pray together, even if we are not with each other in person. Sunday Mass will be live streamed at 1:00 p.m. instead of at noon.

I imagine that there are a lot of you who would agree with me that this is not the Lent we expected this year. Our hearts and minds are preoccupied with worry and perhaps fear as we face the uncertainty of the Coronavirus, COVID 19. Many people throughout the world, and now in our country, state, and city are suffering from its illness. We pray for them and for their recovery. Many others have died. Of course, we also remember them and commend them to the mercy of God that they may know the fullness of joy in God's kingdom forever.

As we journey towards the end of the Lenten Season, our longing for the promise of Easter takes on a most particular approach this year. With everything going on, we need Easter. We need the promise of life beyond the grave that can be found only in knowing Jesus Christ. This Sunday, March 29, is the Fifth Sunday of Lent, and our gospel is the story of Jesus raising from the dead his close friend, Lazarus. This gospel is also where we find one of the shortest verses in the entire Bible: "Jesus Wept" (John 11:35), when he was caught up in the grief of the death of his friend, and when he saw the grief of his friend's sisters, Martha and Mary.

Yet, going beyond this grief, Jesus made the declaration, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25) While we have this assurance, we also can be confident in the hope of Christ freeing us from various other "graves" in which we may find ourselves: graves of worry, concern, fear, and isolation. We can be confident in the love that Christ gives.

Whatever you may be experiencing during this time, rest in this confidence. Recall the other verse from Scripture that appears most frequently: "Do not be afraid." (John 14:27, and elsewhere) We can be confident in these words because this love of Christ is shown in a very real way in our community of St. Vincent de Paul, a parish rich in sincere worship and knowing Christ in one another. Many people tell me how welcome they feel at our parish. They tell me how they experience such welcome in the sincerity of those greeting them as they walk in the door; as they observe the fellowship and care shown to one another; and especially, in the prayerfulness of our liturgies.

March 25, 2020

We do have much to be thankful for in our parish, and although we are separated by the demand of "social distancing," we are still together. Our care for our children and youth in their religious formation and Sacramental preparation, as well as for our adults in the Christian Initiation process continues as efforts are being made for all of them to continue their growth in faith via the Internet. Requests for prayer submitted on our website are received and prayed for. And, as I had stated above, we offer Mass each day, not once, but twice as both Father Richard and I are committed to this highest form of giving praise to God. Sadly, our ministry to our elderly is hampered because we are unable to visit our nursing homes to offer Mass and Communion Services for them. Many of them do not have access to the web. Nevertheless, in the event of an emergency, they and you can count on Father Richard and I being available to any of you who are in grave need or danger of death. We will not keep the Sacraments from you, despite the risk. So you see, our ministries and outreach continue in the name of Christ.

Frequently, all of us priests receive notices from Bishop Vasquez and our Vicar General, Father James Misko. Be it directives from our civil authorities, or from the Vatican itself, we are kept abreast of how we are to proceed for the good of all our communities. In particular, we are receiving instructions on how we are to celebrate our upcoming most sacred days, the Paschal Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. This certainly is going to be different this year, as these must be celebrated without you being physically present.

We most recently received a notice regarding the dire economic struggles you may be experiencing during this crisis. With the uncertainty of the economy, the concern you have for your own situations, and particularly the care of your families, must be very deep. Know that this is one of the main needs that I bring to prayer. At the same time, as I had also stated above, we are a spiritual family, joined together by our being part of the Body of Christ and expressed through our shared Catholic faith.

Our needs as a parish are very real as well. Our ministries do continue, albeit in a very different way than before. The ongoing practical costs of maintaining our plant are huge. Yet, despite the large size of our community, the size of our paid parish staff is relatively small. There are only nine of us, including Father Richard and myself. I have no intentions of eliminating or making changes to any of their positions. However, God alone knows what is going to happen, which makes it very important for us to keep moving forward and to trust in his love, mercy, and providence. And yours.

Understandably, without our physical togetherness at Mass, our Offertory collections have been greatly reduced by fifty percent or more. As your pastor, I ask you to please give prayerful consideration to your own spiritual care of our parish during this time through the e-giving option that we have on our website, or by sending your stewardship tithe to the parish office. These are extraordinary times, and our stewardship of God's Church remains an essential part of our ministry, as well as our own individual response to God.

As we continue, let us keep each other in prayer. Let us also keep in prayer the many healthcare workers; doctors; nurses; hospital orderlies; first responders; laborers in fields picking our fruits and vegetables; truck drivers delivering these fruits and vegetables; grocery store workers; tech support workers; public transportation operators; restaurant workers cooking and delivering meals; those giving of their time in homeless shelters and food pantries; mail carriers; artists sharing their music, art, dance, comedy, videos, and poetry so generously; our elderly, be they in nursing homes or who are

March 25, 2020

homebound; our own parish ministers who are offering to give of their time behind the scenes; and, of course all who are ill and all who have died.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus tells us. He is Lord. We belong to him. Everything in life, good and not so good, sickness and health, even death itself, culminates in him. And in him, we know that our true existence is to be with him forever.

"In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1: 6-7).

God be with you.

Father Ed