



The 14th Station: Jesus Is Laid In The Tomb...

The beautiful painting above is called the "Deposition" by post-Renaissance painter Caravaggio. It is also referred to as the "Entombment of Christ" and depicts the scene when Jesus was taken down from the Cross and his body placed in the tomb. While we are still traveling through Lent and are not yet at this point in our journey to the Cross, considering the current state of affairs in our world, and especially in the Church with the suspension of all public Masses, we might feel

like we are standing there at the 14th Station: our Lord removed from our midst (no Mass), uncertainty for what tomorrow will bring (how long will this last), and sadness at being devoid of His physical presence (in the Eucharist). But is this such a bad thing?

Of course it is a bad thing. Padre Pio knew this so well that he once said, "It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to do without the Holy Mass." While there may be no public Masses being said in our diocese, there are private Masses being said for your intentions. But what to do in the meantime? How are we supposed to understand all of this?

As we move further into this difficult time of closed churches and forbidden gatherings, where the privilege of receiving the sacraments is scarcely available, I believe the Father is asking us to consider our relationship with His Son. As I said in my homily last Sunday, will a hiatus from Mass and Holy Communion really affect our hearts and our lives? If it does, then during the remainder of Lent and for however long this situation lasts, we should spend some time reflecting on the 14th Station. The Apostles and our Blessed Mother placed Jesus in the tomb and had to wait what must have seemed like an eternity for those three days. All of a sudden, they no longer had Him readily available. Were they prepared? Certainly not! They were uncertain, grief-stricken, and scared, much like many of the faithful are feeling today as they are not able to go to church for Mass or receive communion. What we must realize, however, is that Jesus is so much more than "church" or "communion." Jesus must be the essential element of every part of our lives.

We must have a deep and intimate love for our Lord, Jesus, and if we do, then that relationship which is lived out in our hearts and in our prayer life will sustain us and will carry us through this troubling time. Might we in the Diocese of Portland, who are also threatened with a diminishing number of priests, be being given a foreshadowing of what the next generation of Catholics may find all too common in our area? What is God trying to show us?

In my opinion, He is inviting us to meet Him in the calm and silence of His Son's Sacred Heart and to consider where we can deepen our love for Jesus, not to be looking for the next parish with drive-thru confessions and/or complaining about bishops suspending Masses. What we gain spiritually now will serve us well in the future. Be confident in your love for Jesus, and if this experience shows you that that relationship needs work, then spend this time wisely. If you believe during this trial that your relationship is where it needs to be, then if that is true the time that passes will be uneventful, peaceful, and serene. Let us realize that our current circumstances have placed us at the 14th Station, and how we spend this period of waiting will determine how much joy we have when the day of salvation comes and we are once again able to join the priest at the holy altar of God for the Eternal Sacrifice. In effect, we are receiving a deeper call to holiness to live our faith according to what is within during this time of absence of that which is without.

Now that we have set the tone for this new development within the Church, let us turn our attention to the readings of the day. Today is "Laetare Sunday," which in Latin means "rejoice." This theme of rejoicing gives us the opportunity to rejoice that we are almost through the season of Lent, but not yet. The glory of the Resurrection is one week closer, and it is extremely important that we not lose sight of this, no matter our circumstances!

Today's readings show us that God sees, but not as man sees does God see because God sees the heart. David's father was perplexed as to why God would choose the youngest and most insignificant of his sons to be king. God, however, wasn't seeing as Jesse saw, for God saw David's heart, a heart desirous for God, and with that heart He was well pleased. (1 Sm 16:1-13)

Further, the Gospel passage of the man born blind (Jn.9:1-41) illustrates for us that in this world we are often given to blindness, a blindness that prevents us from seeing the will of God in our lives. If ignored, this blindness can lead to participation in "fruitless works of darkness," works that can often be too shameful even to mention. However, with an open heart that is desirous for God, He can work miracles in order to remove our blindness. It isn't until we open our hearts to receive the Light of Christ that we truly see. This gift of sight, then, allows us to give glory to God and to live as children of light in order to produce every goodness, righteousness, and truth as we learn what is pleasing to the Lord. (Eph.5:8-14)

This learning takes patience and perseverance and requires diligence in deepening our relationship with Jesus. Therefore, as we 'wait at the tomb' for this trial of life to pass, we should examine our relationship with Jesus and yearn for the Light that illumines our path. When we find it, we should share it with others! Remember that after those three long days of waiting, the Apostles and our Blessed Mother were rewarded for their patience with the joy of seeing Jesus resurrected from the dead. He was the Light that shone in their darkness! If in this time of barrenness in the Church, you feel like you're living or falling into darkness, remember the words of St. Paul, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." (Eph.5:14)

My brothers and sisters, please know that I will offer the Holy Mass today for your intentions and for an end to this new scourge that has plagued our world, as well as the detrimental effects that follow in its wake. May the Lord have mercy on us and bring us all to a deeper love for Him in and through our sufferings. And if you should find a Mass to watch on TV or the internet, may I offer a couple of suggestions: 1) Don't watch the Mass, pray the Mass, 2) Although you be at home, dress as if you were going to church to attend the Mass, 3) Make all the gestures (e.g., the sign of the cross) and assume all the body postures when able (e.g., kneeling/standing/sitting), and most of all 4) Give thanks to our Father in Heaven that He sent His Son to save us. During the Mass, it would be a holy and wholesome thing to make an act of spiritual communion. I've included one version below.

With prayers for your continued holiness and God's protection over you and your family,

Fr. Philip Clement

Pastor

Act of Spiritual Communion by St. Alphonsus Liguori

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you were already there, I embrace you and unite myself wholly to you; permit not that I should ever be separated from you. Amen.