

Two weeks ago, when I first heard the news that our parish and school would be closing because of the coronavirus, I had no idea how we'd deal with this crisis.

St. Pius X didn't have a contingency plan for a pandemic that I could pull out and use.

So I started to panic and I got stressed out because I couldn't see where this crisis might lead and how we'd get through it.

A few weeks into the crisis I realize now that most of my stress came from fear and doubt.

And some of it is personal, for example, I've been afraid for my mom's health. I've been fearful for family members who've lost their jobs. But I've also been afraid for all of you - your health, your families, and your money issues. I've had doubts about how the parish could meet your spiritual needs. And to be totally honest, I've even had moments of doubt that God would see us through this crisis. So those are some of my fears and doubts....what's on your list?

SCREEN: fear: an emotional response to real or perceived danger.

According to the dictionary, fear is an emotional response to real or perceived danger. An emotional response to real **OR** perceived danger. Sometimes fear is good, it's healthy, it keeps us alive. It's that feeling you get when you stand too close to the edge of a cliff. The danger is real: you have to be careful or you could slip and fall. In this pandemic, we're all washing our hands more often and maintaining social distancing. Why? Because the danger of the coronavirus is real. But then there's unhealthy fear when a danger is imagined. And we've seen some of that the past few weeks: the scenes of panic buying and hoarding of supplies.

For a few people it's holing up in a bunker to ride it out.

Unhealthy fear can freeze a person in place - making them unable to act or move.

It is driven entirely by emotion and can actually make you sick!

So that's fear.

SCREEN: doubt: when you start to question if something you assumed to be true, is really true.

And doubt is when you start to question if something you assumed to be true, is really true.

This crisis might have you doubting that you can provide for your family, that you can keep them healthy.

Maybe you're doubting that your job is safe, or that your faith is strong, or that the future will be bright.

Now, the parish staff and I began working on these messages - these homilies - before Christmas.

So starting in December, we prayed over today's readings and decided that Jesus's message is that we need to let go of our fears and doubts.

Little did we know how important that message would be in Lent of 2020.

So let's dig deeper into today's Gospel.

SCREEN: blank red background

We were introduced to two sisters who were very close friends of Jesus: Martha and Mary.

And they are reeling from a tragedy - their brother Lazarus has just died.

Imagine the questions that went through their minds:

Why didn't Jesus come and heal our brother when he was sick?

Where is our brother Lazarus now?

Will we ever see him again?

Where is God?

Doesn't God love us?

How will we get through this?

If you've ever faced a similar tragedy you know the fears and doubts

Martha and Mary had.

And Jesus knew what they were going through.

So what did he do?

He stepped into their grief, he acknowledged their pain their fears and doubts and then he led them to true faith.

When Jesus asked Martha if she believed that he is the resurrection and the life, she made this powerful proclamation when she said this:

**SCREEN: “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that
you are the Christ, the Son of God,
the one who is coming into the world.” - John 11:27**

And remember, Martha said this *before* Jesus raised her brother from the dead.

Martha shows us what discipleship requires.

She’s teaching us that the opposite of fear is hope and
the opposite of doubt is faith.

The opposite of fear is hope and
the opposite of doubt is faith.

The question Jesus posed to Martha he asks today of you:

Do you believe?

Do you believe with your whole heart that he is the resurrection and the life?

And like Martha, will you allow Jesus to lead you to a place of hope and trust?

And I ask that because with today’s crisis,

we can be let our fears and doubts control us

(that’s the unhealthy, paralyzing reaction I described) - OR

we can let go of our fears and doubts-

we can give them to Christ so he can heal us.

And Christ wants to heal us...heal me and you.

God didn’t bring you this far to let you fail.

God wants you to succeed.

So how can you do what Jesus is asking?

How can you let go of your fears and doubts?

SCREEN: focus on what’s right in front of you

Here's the first way: focus on what's right in front of you.
What you can see, what you can take care of and address.
That's what the parish staff and I have been doing.
We've faced huge challenges figuring out how to do online worship,
how to maintain our ministries and programs,
how to connect with you and connect you with each other.
When this all began, the easiest choice would have been to do nothing,
to decide, *'well everything is closed, there's nothing we can do.'*
That would have been letting our fears and doubts control us, being paralyzed.
Instead we decided, *'let's just take it one day at a time,
one step at a time, we'll focus on what is right in front of us.'*
And your response to all our efforts has been so encouraging.
So our advice to you is to do what we're doing:
only focus on what's right in front of you today or this week.
This isn't the time for long term planning.
Don't dwell on all the 'what if's' and things you can't control,
or you'll end up paralyzed.
God wants you to be free of fear so you can love him and reach out to others.

SCREEN: remember God's promises

Next, remember what God has already done for you
and what God has promised - which is that no matter how dark times get,
or how challenging life becomes,
God is always with you, you are never alone.
So keep the focus on God, not on what is swirling around you.

SCREEN: filter out the noise

And filter out the noise.
You might remember hearing this in an earlier message series,
but it really applies now.
Limit your exposure to all the news about this crisis.
Decide you'll check the news in the morning or midday
or the evening but not constantly.

Don't follow negative thoughts.

Try to recognize when you are in a spiral of fear and doubt,
and keep telling yourself that the opposite is true:

God has the whole world in his hands.

God loves and cares for you and will never abandon you, ever.

In other words:

SCREEN: pray with confidence

Pray with confidence.

Pray by yourself and pray with others.

When you pray with others, even online as we are doing now,
you create solidarity within the Body of Christ:

you become one with God and others and discover real power and real peace.

I want to encourage you again to join me and members of our parish
every day at 4pm in praying Kerry Weber's coronavirus Prayer.

You can find it on our website - spxbowie.org

SCREEN: serve someone in need

And the final way I'll mention to help you let go of your fears and doubts
is to serve someone in need.

And I know many of you are already doing this with family and friends,
with neighbors and parishioners.

If you are looking for ways to serve, check out our e-bulletin
or website for all the possibilities.

Serving right now looks different than before the pandemic.

With our buildings closed, we need you to serve in your neighborhood
and in our community.

So five ways to let go of our fears and doubts and help
others with theirs:

- focus on what's right in front of us,
- filter out the noise
- remember God's promises by
- praying with confidence and

- serve someone in need

Today, let us commit to be strong in faith,

like Martha and Mary, that we too can profess every day this week:

Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God,

the one who is coming into the world.

Amen. +

A coronavirus Prayer by Kerry Weber

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.”

At your command, the sick were made well.

Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus,
that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus.

May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together
and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to
a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus.

May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died.

As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair.

May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals
who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process.

May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations.

Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the wellbeing
of the people they are meant to serve.

Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will
help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks.

May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare.

In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. Jesus Christ, heal us. Amen.