

“Rejoice while you have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor.”

St. Peter’s words to us. Rejoice in your trials, because they test your faith, like fire tests the purity of gold.

Does everyone know that the Church of Christ has a “vanishing center?” A mysterious, invisible heart. Who lives there? Christian hermits.

In the 20th century, Father Thomas Merton gained fame among Catholics by seeking this total solitude. And many of us love St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross, for the same reason.

A Christian hermit devotes his or her entire life to praising God and fostering the world’s salvation. How? By SEPARATING him or herself from human society, in order to live a life of pure prayer and penance.

Christian hermits manifest the interior aspect of the mystery of salvation. Personal intimacy with Christ. A hermit lives hidden from other human eyes and preaches the Gospel silently. By surrendering absolutely everything to God in the desert of silence, the hermit finds the glory of Christ crucified.

All this comes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 920 and 921. Maybe it sounds all too familiar right now. We could re-word the Catechism sentences like this:

‘LIVING AS A CATHOLIC DURING THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC manifests the interior aspect of the mystery of salvation. MAINTAINING A SPIRITUAL LIFE DURING ISOLATION involves personal intimacy with Christ. THE CHRISTIAN STAYING AT HOME ON SUNDAY MORNING FOR THE SAKE OF PUBLIC HEALTH finds in the desert of silence the glory of Christ crucified.’

May God give us strength and insight. By His invisible power and grace, these weeks can deepen and intensify our spiritual lives.

May we co-operate with His grace! May we find the discipline we need. The real hermits will be the first to tell us: when your home and your church are the same little building, and you never leave, you either get holier. Or you lose it altogether.

On the other hand... We read something else in today’s readings: “They devoted themselves to the communal life. All who believed were together.”

The Lord has not called us all to live as Christian hermits forever. By no means.

What SHOULD we be doing as a parish right now? We should be having First Communions, with the kids in their white suits and dresses. And big Quinceañeras. Cakes after Mass. Weddings with string quartets and trombones. Processions to the Virgin's grotto. Mexican dances with tambourines and somersaults. Candles, chants, incense.

After all, Catholicism doesn't mean just, "here come the hermits." Catholicism means: "Here comes everybody."

Now, you know me as a man of stone-like stoicism. I find my own personal emotions so uninteresting that I consistently ignore them--so that they will leave me alone.

But you will see me cry. When we come together again in church. Before I can even make the sign of the cross, I guarantee you, I will be crying for joy like a daggone baby.