



Third Sunday of Lent

March 15, 2020

Readings

This week:

Exodus 17:3–7

Romans 5:1–2, 5–8

John 4:5–42

Next week:

1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6–7, 1013a

Ephesians 5:8–14

John 9:1–41

Psalm

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. (*Psalm 95*)

Today

Today's presider is Fr. José Rubio.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to “full, active and conscious participation” in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

Calendar

Monday, March 16, 7:00 p.m.

TMC Spiritual Education Committee
Thomas House Library

From Thomas Merton

The saints of the 15th century are among those who most move me. In the collapse of medieval society, corruption of the clergy, decadence of conventual life, there emerge men and women of the laity *supremely obedient to God*, especially Nicholas of Flue and Joan of Arc. Complete and simple signs of contradiction to worldliness and system and convention and prejudiced interest. *Not* rebels at all, but completely meek and submissive instruments of God. In them you see clearly and movingly revealed what it is *not* to be a mere rebel but to be obedient to God as a sign to men, a sign of mercy, a revelation of truth and power. I am drawn to these “signs” of God with all the love of my heart, trusting above all in their love and their intercession, for they live in the glory of God. I would not love them if God had not made them “sacraments” to me.

The Intimate Merton, His Life from His Journals

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development. Visit: www.thomasmerton.org.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

March is TMC membership month:



Thomas Merton Center (TMC) membership materials will be sent out to all current TMC members in March.

The Thomas Merton Center is a membership-based nonprofit religious education organization required by its bylaws to register its membership annually. Membership fees are minimal—\$15 per individual or \$30 per family. Your choice to become a member helps to keep this Catholic, lay-led, progressive faith community active.

Your membership shows your support for sustaining the Sunday 8:45 a.m. Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas church, the adult spiritual education programs, and educational opportunities at St. Elizabeth Seton School in Palo Alto.

Please contact Kay Williams for more information: kaywill@pacbell.net, 650-270-4188.

Mass time change coming April 19:

At the request of STA's pastor, Fr. Stasys Mikalonis, and in collaboration with the 7:30 Mass sacristans, we will be changing the start time of this Mass to 9:00 a.m. on April 19th. This adjustment will allow a smoother transition between the 7:30 and 8:45 Masses. We will keep reminding you of the new time as April 19 approaches.

CANCELLED:

Lenten Morning Retreat March 21:

It is with regret that we have had to postpone/cancel the March 21 Lenten Morning Retreat with Fr. Kevin Ballard. We hope to reschedule for a later date.

Prayer for St. Patrick's Day:



May the strength of God pilot us.
May the wisdom of God instruct us.
May the hand of God protect us.
May the word of God direct us—
May thy salvation, O Lord,
Be always ours this day
And for evermore.
Amen.
(attributed to St. Patrick)

TMC Board: Gerard McGuire, gerardmc@aol.com, 650-814-2223

Bulletin: Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net

Finance: Helena Wee, 650-520-7556, shhwee@sbcglobal.net

Hospitality: Jim Davis, 650-704-8002

Liturgy: John Arnold, 650-269-2950, jsaoso@comcast.net
Sally Benson, 408-464-0750, sallymbenson@gmail.com

Membership: Kay Williams, 650-270-4188, kaywill@pacbell.net
Adult Education: Jim Davis, 650-704-8002, Jim_Davis@pacbell.net
Mary Coady, 650-261-9155, coady_94025@yahoo.com

Website: Jim Davis, 650-704-8002, james_davis@pacbell.net

Can you help with Sunday coffee & donuts?

The TMC hospitality ministry is an important and rewarding adjunct to our weekly Sunday Mass. It is often the friendly public face of our community. There is a core group of volunteers who keep it running smoothly and perform a myriad of tasks behind the scenes: from picking up the fresh donuts each week, making coffee, setting out the plates, cups and napkins, to cleaning up afterwards to hand off the facility in good order for the next users.

However, our volunteer support staff is dwindling in numbers and we are in need of help. Please, please consider helping out one or more Sundays a month. Let me know if you can join the team by talking to me directly or by sending an email to jim_davis@pacbell.net. You may also speak to Anna Jaklitsch who coordinates the activity in my absence..

Jim Davis, TMC Hospitality

Seton School books collection: March 14-15:



Our parish collection for new books for Seton 2nd grade books will be held this weekend. Your generosity in past years has provided a package of 5-7 books for each 2nd grade student to read at home during the long summer weeks. These emerging readers benefit from this educational opportunity inspiring them to read, learn and share these books with others while maintaining

skills during their school break.

Last year, each 2nd grader received 4 favorite individual choices which was a real winner! Recent feedback from those students was very positive!

Any cash donations may be given to a Human Concerns rep after each mass that weekend. We are happy to shop for you! You will see lots of smiling faces in photos of the handing-out event come June.

--The Human Concerns Committee

PRAY FOR US: Please remember in your prayers this week Art Adams, Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, Char Buchholz, Tom Carmody, Kerry Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Jim Davis, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leininger, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Patricia Markee, Nancy Marty, Mercedes McCaffrey, Maureen Mooney, Susan Miller, Hayden Pastorini, Dick and Jeanne Placone, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, KathyAnne Woodruff and T. J. Wooten.
[Add/subtract names by e-mailing Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net.]

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

COVID-19, a spiritual and physical threat:

[By Thomas Reese, S.J., *National Catholic Reporter*, 3/12/20]

The Christian faith is not just a personal commitment, it is also a communal experience. From the very beginning, Christians have gathered to share the Word of God and break bread in confined spaces. They drank from the same cup and shared a holy kiss. They also cared for the poor and the sick.

All of these Christian practices are now seen as ways that the coronavirus can spread through populations. That is why the coronavirus is so threatening, not only physically but also spiritually.

In a pre-scientific age, we might carry on and ask God to protect us. Many saints died caring for plague victims. Aloysius Gonzaga, patron saint of the Jesuit high school where I live, died in 1591 at the age of 23 while caring for victims of the plague in Rome.

Today, public health officials recommend that we put distance between ourselves and others so as not to spread the virus. At first blush, this "social distancing" sounds un-Christian, but we need to listen to medical experts. As with doctors, the first rule of a Christian at this time is "Do no harm." That means not doing anything that might spread the virus to others.

In the time before germs and viruses were understood, people blamed strangers, Jews and witches for sickness. Anyone who was different could be the target of people's fear. The public was also offered potions that often caused more harm than good. Even today, conspiracy theories abound and fake cures are sold to the gullible. Again, we need to listen to medical experts and not to conspiracy theorists who use any crisis to make money or stir up hatred and division.

The experts tell us that the best ways to avoid the virus are truly simple:

1. Wash your hands. Wash your hands. Wash your hands!
2. Don't touch your face. Don't touch your face. Don't touch your face!

Like Naaman, the Aramean general we read about in the Bible's Second Book of Kings, who scoffed when the Prophet Elisha told him to wash seven times in the Jordan to cure his illness, we don't take simple solutions seriously. But we need to listen to Naaman's servants, who challenged him by saying, "If the prophet told you to do something extraordinary, would you not do it? All the more since he told you, 'Wash, and be clean!'"

Since Catholics gather to celebrate the Eucharist every

Sunday, they have had to take preventive measures to avoid the spread of the virus. In China and Italy, services have been canceled and churches have been closed at the advice of public health officials.

In the United States and elsewhere, Catholics have been strongly urged to receive Communion in the hand and not on the tongue. Every Communion minister knows that it is impossible to distribute Communion on the tongue without touching at least some tongues. This means the minister must stop and disinfect his or her hands or risk giving the virus to the remaining communicants.

Only the sacred bread is being distributed at many Catholic Masses, not the cup. Priests who concelebrate are receiving through intinction, where the bread is dipped into the cup before reception.

Priests and Communion ministers are told to disinfect their hands before and after distributing Communion.

Churchgoers have also been asked not to hold hands during the Lord's Prayer or to shake hands during the kiss of peace. People are bowing or flashing each other the peace sign.

In addition, holy water fonts have been emptied and people have been asked not to kiss church statues or crucifixes during their devotions.

All of these are reasonable precautions to take during this crisis. We will be able to return to normal when the epidemic is over.

But Christians have a responsibility beyond practicing personal hygiene. We also have a public responsibility to support civic programs to protect the vulnerable and care for the sick. In the short term, that means supporting health care workers who put themselves at risk caring for those who have fallen ill. It means scrupulously following the instructions of public health officials. It means supporting programs to help those without health insurance, without sick leave, without day care and without paychecks because their employers have laid them off during the health crisis.

Beyond these short-term responses, Christians also must demand that their government be better prepared for such epidemics. Cutting budgets for research and preparedness is not only shortsighted but dangerous. In a globalized world, pandemics must be expected and planned for. When this crisis is over, we cannot go back to sleep and ignore the best advice from scientists and experts.

The saints of old risked their lives for those with the plague. We can at least do our civic duty. #

Giving up Mass for Lent:

[By Father Bill Grimm MM, Tokyo, Japan, *LaCroix International*, March 9, 2020]

It is the spring sumo season in Japan, one of the six two-week periods of the year when the national sport is played out before huge crowds. But not this year. The media are showing the wrestling tournament taking place in an empty venue. Spectators are banned from the arena.

In various parts of the world, especially perhaps in Asia, bishops have cancelled Sunday Masses and other gatherings as a preventative measure against the spread of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19, a potentially fatal infection that seems headed to becoming a pandemic.

It is disappointing, but sadly not too surprising, to see how many Catholics are trying to get around that cancellation, intruding into hitherto small-group Masses at convents and religious houses and thereby forcing those communities to either close to outsiders or cancel their own in-house liturgies.

A nursing facility for sick aged sisters where I celebrate a weekly Mass has had to cancel its Sunday liturgies because of the number of outsiders who have tried to come, seeming to think that their being at Mass is more important than protecting the lives of the elderly sisters who are especially at risk if they are exposed to the virus.

I know of a community of male religious in Tokyo who are hosting all comers, reportedly filling their church with people whose own churches are obeying the diocesan cancellation order. This abets the disobedient, the thoughtless, the selfish and the stupid while endangering society at large. But it presumably fills the coffers of the religious through augmented collections that will probably not be earmarked for epidemic relief.

Those people show no concern for the rationale behind the cessation of large-group Masses nor obedience to leaders of the Church and civil society. They selfishly feel that their private piety is more important than the health and safety and even the lives of their sisters and brothers.

Some have even disputed the authority of their bishops to issue such cancellation orders. For the record, bishops have that authority, regardless of what people who seem to consider themselves super-Catholics might think. In fact, given the present state of the epidemic and the uncertainty about its likely course, to not cancel church gatherings would be irresponsible on the part of bishops in affected areas.

Apart from those who consider themselves exempt, we Catholics in virus-affected areas have in effect been forced to give up Mass for a major and not-yet-clear duration during Lent. The challenge and opportunity for us is to see how this deprivation might deepen our faith, hope and love in preparation for renewing our baptismal commitment at Easter whether we are able to gather then or not.

Of course, the cancellation of parish liturgies does not prevent our using the time we would usually spend taking part in the Mass to read and reflect on the prayers and readings of the day. We may find, in fact, that we are able to develop better personal "homilies" than those we may endure in normal circumstances.

We can even have a "collection," putting aside money to be later contributed to our parishes because though Masses have been cancelled most major expenses have not been. Salaries must still be paid, and at least in Tokyo the electric company has shown no indication that it will cancel charges to churches that are not gathering each Sunday.

Our Lenten fasts and sacrifices are meant in part to increase our awareness of the situation of our brothers and sisters who must do without not by choice, nor for a limited time, but because of enduring poverty, famine, oppression or lack of opportunity.

Might not our "fasting" from Sunday Mass give us a closer communion with our sisters and brothers who must do without Eucharistic celebrations for months or even years at a time because there are no priests available to join their gatherings?

Such is the case, for instance, in the Amazon region of South America, and at their recent synod the bishops of Amazonia declared that ordaining married men should be considered as a means of alleviating that enforced "fast" from the Eucharist. Pope Francis is apparently waiting for one or more of those bishops to say he will take that step.

What is true of Amazonia is going to be true of the rest of the Church as well. The epidemic of priestlessness will spread. In much of the world, most of the leaders of Eucharistic celebrations are white-haired if they have hair. That is not a good augury for the future.

Perhaps the temporary Eucharistic fast imposed by the coronavirus will give us all a sense of urgency in preparing to head off Eucharistic poverty. Then, if we — all of us — search out creative answers to the problem, we may find that just as fasting can improve our physical as well as spiritual health, our giving up Mass for Lent will have improved our Church's health. #