

CARDINAL SEÁN P. O'MALLEY OPENING REMARKS
ST. PATRICK'S DAY MASS

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We need to take care of each other”

March 17, 2020

As a people, community, and as a nation we are being forced into a stance of social distancing to ward off a potential health disaster. Even as we embrace a methodology of physical isolation, we must reject any stance of alienation and individualism. Our motivation cannot be fear and self-preservation, but a sense of solidarity and connectedness. What is being asked of us is for the common good, to protect the most defenseless among us.

In some ways the present, surrealistic atmosphere is similar to what we experienced after the attack of September 11. We were shaken from our complacency and confronted with the reality that changed our lives overnight. Likewise, today we see the real risk to countless numbers of elderly and infirm persons, to healthcare workers, indeed to our hospital system, and even the economic well-being of millions of people whose lives have been upended by the necessary closings and precautions.

Just as after 9/11 we need to come together as a people with a profound sense of solidarity and community, realizing that so many people are suffering and fearful. We need to take care of each other, especially by reaching out to the elderly and the most vulnerable.

Although we cannot celebrate public masses at this time because we wish to follow the directives of the government, I want to assure all of you that we, your priests, are offering mass each day for all of you. You are all spiritually united in these masses where

we pray for the living and the dead. Our priests in the parishes are there and can be contacted. We are trying to use social media and Internet streaming as a means of sharing communications.

I am grateful to all of our priests and parish staffs and the 3000 Catholic school teachers and administrators who are all working diligently to be able to serve our people in these challenging circumstances. Please remember that your parish communities depend on the offertory collections and will need your support going forward to carry on their crucial work.

Let me share with you an account I read many years ago that made quite an impression on me. A group of rowdy university students on the train in France spotted an old man sitting alone praying his rosary. The students who prided themselves on their sophistication and scientific outlook began to mock the old man who seemed unperturbed by their hazing. Suddenly a passenger jumped to his feet and rebuked the students: “stop bothering Dr. Pasteur.” The students were shocked and embarrassed. That old man praying the rosary was Louis Pasteur, a national hero, a rock star, whose research and inventions have saved millions of lives. Pasteur discovered the principles of vaccination and pasteurization. Arguably, he did more than any other person in the history of medicine by his remarkable breakthroughs in understanding the causes and prevention of diseases.

I share this story to preface my request to pray the rosary each day. Many of us remember growing up praying the rosary every evening as a family. In the history of our people, during the wars, famines, plagues, and persecution, the rosary has been the powerful prayer of the Catholic people as we see in the example of the eminent scientist Louis Pasteur. Even if we cannot go to mass, the rosary is always accessible to us. It is a prayer that puts us in touch with God as we reflect on the mysteries of the life of Christ and the blessed virgin. It is a prayer that can be prayed by the simplest present and the smartest scientist.

St. Ignatius of Loyola once said that we must work as if everything depended upon us, and pray as if everything depended upon God. It is indeed encouraging to see how many people are visiting our churches for personal prayer and adoration during this time of enforced social distancing. May this strange Lent that we are living, help us to overcome the physical distance by growing closer to God and by strengthening our sense of solidarity and community with each other.