

Dear Parish Family,

I hope and pray that each of you and your families are doing well. It has been an incredibly difficult week for many, as we wrestle with what is going on in the world around us. Whether it is what we see on television, what we hear on the radio, or even read on the internet, these are indeed extraordinary times. So, we must continue to do what we do best here at St. Mary's, and that is to buckle down and pray. Pray as an individual, pray as a couple and pray as a family. I am a firm believer in the power of prayer and I know the Lord hears our prayers and petitions.

This past Sunday morning, Fr. Jean Baptiste celebrated Mass at Camp Tecaboca for the Women of the ACTS retreat since they did not have the opportunity for a homecoming Mass. I remained here at the parish and early Sunday morning, as I do week after week, I put on my vestments and celebrated Mass. However, I was all alone in the big church. But I was only alone physically. Without any doubt, I felt the power of your presence within me. I actually heard the beautiful voices of crying babies, the loud bang of the kneelers hitting the wooden floors and the delightful sound of the community singing various hymns. It was beautiful, truly beautiful and I was at peace.

In all honesty, the Coronavirus has been dominating my thoughts these last few weeks. I am incessantly concerned for the safety of our parishioners, especially the most vulnerable and hope that each of you will persevere in your "faithful witness" to Christ. As your pastor, I want to encourage each of you to remain vigilant in your prayers, most especially our families. Use this time to work on your spiritual growth as an individual, as a couple and as a family. Ask the Lord to keep you and your loved ones happy and healthy. Ask Him to pour forth His healing grace upon those who have contracted the virus and those who have died, as well as their grieving families. As Christians we are not only to suffer with those inflicted but we have a responsibility to pray for those who are fearful, and to bring to them the peace of Christ. I urge those of you who are experiencing anxiety or those who lack peace to meditate on the scriptures, asking God for help.

The Coronavirus is not happening outside of God's will. Just think for a moment about Abraham and Jonah and their efforts on behalf of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah and Nineveh, respectively. We are this city's Abraham and Jonah. We must pray for God's mercy upon our parish family and to bring peace upon the City of Fredericksburg through our prayers and testimony. Let us ask the Lord for a loving soul and an earnestly prayerful heart. Because we surely know that only through the hope of the Lord's mercy will this pandemic cease to exist.

These days, we are encouraged to be vigilant and cautious. The choice to take precautions reflects our commitment to protect each other and the most vulnerable

among us. Below please find new information from the city & county which reinforced implementation of the Governor's direction that was given earlier today, as well as a few links that might be of assistance.

The following restrictions go into effect tomorrow at midnight and remain in effect until midnight, April 3.

- All public gatherings, including weddings and funerals, will be limited to 10 persons.
- No in-restaurant dining. Drive-through and curbside service is still allowed.
- Bars and gyms to be closed.
- Schools remain closed.
- No visitation to nursing homes and assisted living centers.

Links:

- [Whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf)
- Hill Country Memorial Hospital has a COVID-19 Information line - 830.990.6100
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

In closing, on behalf of myself, Fr. Jean Baptiste, and our amazing parish staff we want you to know how much each of you are loved. I will continue to provide the parish with updates as I receive them from the Archdiocese. So, for now, let us pray, rest, eat healthily and spend time with our families. Know in your beautiful hearts my friends that as I stand alone in the quietness of the big church this weekend celebrating the Holy Mass, you are right there with me in thought and prayer. Keep the faith!

Peace & love,

Fr. John