



Greetings Parish Family,

I hope and pray that each of you are doing well and you are continuing to follow the sheltering guidelines which have been placed before us.

I have read more about COVID-19 than is healthy! It made me think about this: For several years now, I have been saying that our society has made “wellness” and “salvation” into the same thing. But this is not true and can never be true. I fear that society has led young people, to believe that wellbeing and salvation are the same thing. A person can be “well” but have no sense of what it means to be saved. When I was growing up, salvation was an important word. Now, we don’t hear it that much. There are things that might make me “well” but would be harmful for my salvation. All sorts of therapies can be helpful for a person’s wellbeing, but they could never replace the Eucharist, necessary for our salvation.

We hope and pray that scientists will find a vaccination and a cure for coronavirus as soon as possible. Please God, may this happen. Finding a vaccination or a cure, however, will not ensure salvation, which only comes from God. Perhaps the current climate that we are living in can be an opportunity for us to depend on God for salvation. Perhaps the circumstances will invite us to know real freedom — freedom that comes from the presence of God and can never be taken from us. Let this pandemic be an invitation from God for us to seek that true freedom, which only comes from him.

I have also been thinking about what role the Church should play during this pandemic. The Church knows a lot about responding to people’s needs in times of plague. The Church has always done so with charity and love and dedication and commitment. Not a few saints — St. Charles Borromeo, St. Roch, St. Damian of Molokai — have died while ministering to the sick during plagues and pandemics.

At the current moment the Church’s response looks too much like the response of civil society. Hunker down, take cover, don’t go anywhere. I understand this at one level. We must obey the rules that civil authorities impose on us; sacrificing certain ordinary and frivolous activities that could help spread the virus is an expression of care for the most vulnerable among us in the face of a deadly contagion. We must also obey the Gospel which never calls us to self-preservation, but always to lose ourselves in the service of the other. As the current pandemic unfolds, the Church has to be courageous in responding to the needs of the faithful. The Church is in the business of tending to peoples’ souls. I will have to figure out what that means for me as a priest.

How bishops and priests respond to the faithful at this difficult time could be the beginning of restoring trust in the Church’s leaders after the clergy sexual abuse crisis. If the Church does not respond as the Gospel impels us to, it could mean losing that trust forever.

In a letter to the Diocese of Rome clergy on March 13, Pope Francis wrote, "The government has the duty to guarantee care and material sustenance for the people, but we have the duty to do the same for their souls. May it never be said: 'I'm never going back to a church where no one came to find me when I needed help.'"

Please do not stop reaching out to one another. Make that phone call or put that Hallmark card in the mail. In opening our amazing hearts, may we continue being Christ like to others. Know that I couldn't be prouder of this community on how you all have responded to this horrific pandemic.

Our live streaming Masses will continue in the weeks to come. I am happy that so many of you are watching Mass and are signing up to join us. I am also overjoyed and thrilled to say from my heart, "Thank You." Thank you for your continued love of your parish. Your prayers, your love for one another and your generous tithing leaves me speechless at times. Thank you!!

In closing, last night, all the pastors of the Archdiocese received an email from Archbishop Gustavo extending his decree until May 18, 2020. We must do our best to remain faithful to state and local officials request to shelter in place. I truly believe that we here in Gillespie County have been spared from the virus coming full force into our community because we have sheltered in place. I know this is not easy, but it is what we must do at this time.

Know that all of you remain in my prayers. I ask that you pray for one another, the parish staff, our Deacons and both Fr. Jean Baptiste and myself as well. We love you.

Peace & love,

Fr. John