



ST. ANN

CATHOLIC CHURCH

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

Established 1869 #StAnn150

Lent 2020

My dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Ann's Church,

As we are tested by this difficult ordeal of the contagion of the coronavirus which reaches almost every country in the world, I want to greet each one of you and to assure you of my prayer. A few weeks ago, none of us could have imagined the situation we are experiencing now. The current circumstances have prevented us from gathering for Mass, especially on Sundays. The church remains open during regular hours, but the absence of the Mass is so strange for you – and I dare say for myself as a priest. Without the public offering of Mass, though, we are still united by bonds of faith, hope, and love and through our personal prayer and sacrifices can mature spiritually. So, I thought I could offer you some reflections as we go through this unique Lenten time together.

On Ash Wednesday, we heard the words of our divine Lord who told us, “But when pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matthew 6). Our Lenten pilgrimage took us with the Lord into the desert to accompany Him on this Lenten journey towards Easter. For most of us who are staying inside or distancing ourselves physically from others, we have gone to that “inner room” literally. There in that relatively quiet place, we are invited to go “inside” the desert of our soul. Through penitence, prayer, and almsgiving, we discover God’s immense love, compassion, and mercy. Through self-denial we turn away from sin and believe more eagerly in the truth of the Gospel. During this critical time of public health crisis, we are spiritually still in the desert with Him and with ourselves – perhaps for a longer period than 40 days – in the quiet and hopeful waiting. It’s not easy; in fact, for many the desert is a lonely and even fearful place. The desert, however, is where the Lord is right now in our relationship with Him; so, stay with Him and He will stay with you. Do not deny Him, and He will not deny you. The desert where we can encounter Jesus again and learn from His example of self-denial, penance, and conversion.

Additionally, out of concern and reverence for each other’s health, we deny ourselves public worship and His Body and Blood in Holy Communion; and there is a very real sadness in doing so. For us who know the spiritual benefit of communing with our divine Lord at Mass through the Holy Eucharist, it is a very strange feeling indeed not to attend Mass and not to receive the Blessed Sacrament. The whole thing is, in a word, extremely weird; spiritually, things are not as they normally should be. That’s because we long for the One we love. We miss the one we love so much. So, we long for Jesus. This spiritual longing can be a positive indication of our intense

desire to be even closer to Jesus. In a certain way, the denial of the Sacrament is not a bad thing entirely; in fact, it can be essential to spiritual growth as each of us contemplates just what we don't have in order to desire more the satisfaction of knowing that when we receive our Lord again one day at Mass that our joy will be all the more complete. We delay the present gratification of reception of the Holy Eucharist in favor of future reward; for we know that we will be with Him again at Mass one day when the crisis is over and we can rejoice together.

This moment should also prompt all of us to reflect seriously on the precious gift of our Faith and never to take for granted the graces which come through the Church, especially through the Sacrifice of the Mass which momentarily we are unable to experience. What would it look like if we could never attend Mass again? How would it feel if our church doors were closed forever? What would it mean if there were no more priests to offer the Mass? Would it matter? For us who already know the answer, these questions should encourage us to appreciate the gift that is our Catholic Faith, the gift that is our parish church, the gift that is Jesus Christ our divine Lord in the holiest of Sacraments. What difference does it make? All the difference in the world.

In the meantime, remember our Lord's famous words, "Do not be afraid," and, "Peace be with you." Be assured of my prayers for you and your families and loved ones during our extended stay in the "desert" of Lent. Special prayers for the sick and dying, as well as for our doctors and nurses and all health-care providers. We long for returning to church. We miss each other, and we miss our Lord. One day we shall be together with Him again in the public celebration of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of our divine Savior.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Reverend Msgr. James D. Watkins
Pastor