

**St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter 2020 – May 10, 2020**  
**Homily by Msgr. Watkins, Pastor**

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

I greet all of you who join us by way of social media today for our celebration of the Easter Season on this, the Fifth Sunday of Easter. So many of us are still wondering when this difficult ordeal of the contagion of the coronavirus will be over. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in St. Luke's Gospel a couple of weeks ago, our eyes from time to time may be downcast in fear, anxiety, confusion, or even despair. These feelings may be yours right now, AND they were similar feelings, I think, that the early disciples must have had after the death of their beloved Master and Lord that Good Friday 2000 years ago. Their world, like ours in a way, was turned upside down in a quick moment. Here they had the joy of welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, only to witness and experience everything fall apart within five days! He was taken from them quickly and crucified. The world, as they knew it, was grossly unjust with its own versions of political unrest, plagues, earthquakes, and fires. Even the Son of God was not immune to the disease of man's sin which pinned Him to the Cross. Even today, our sins continue to crucify Him. Our world today is turned on its head, and we find ourselves with eyes cast down, wondering and afraid. What will the future hold in store for us? Is there a reason to explain all of this? "Why, Lord?" we might ask. The same kinds of questions and confusion must have overwhelmed the early disciples that Good Friday 2000 years ago. Seemingly, nothing has changed in one sense – then, as now.

For several weeks now, none of us could have imagined the situation we are experiencing; yet, we are beginning to find our own "new routine" of coping and managing the situation as best we can. We are getting somewhat used to the "new order," even though we may think we can all go back to the same routine "when it's all over" -- perhaps not exactly as the same as before. 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 time of worship together.

We are experiencing an international crisis right now. The word, “crisis,” comes from the Greek, “Krisis,” which means “decision-making.” In this crisis of the pandemic around us, each of us is invited (even challenged) to make a decision. We can give in to excessive worry about our own health or the health of loved ones, and, if left unchecked, that worry can breed anxiety or depression. We know those feelings. Each of us has been there before.

But let’s make a distinction which I hope can be useful as we face difficult situations and challenging relationships. For those who have been practicing Crisis Management most of their lives, this is nothing new. For every Crisis (KRISIS), calls for a decision, a GOOD decision, an appropriate decision. We can say that the decisions each of us makes is either “a creative response to an unknown situation, or, an adequate response to an known situation. Either way, we make a decision. The decision, we say, is ours. It’s an incredible gift of the human psyche, created by God, to respond. And we can respond with worry, or we can respond with trust. And this is the critical distinction at play in so many of the accounts in the Gospel between Jesus and His disciples – perhaps many of the same accounts in our own lives with the Lord.

On the one hand, it’s OK to stress about a situation or a relationship. Stress is the natural result of work. When we work a situation, we stress. When we work our bodies in exercise, we stress. Just getting up each day can be stressful, as we attend to the many things we have to do to get on with the day: bathing, preparing food, cleaning up, getting on with our jobs – just the daily work of life. That’s something we can’t avoid; it’s just part of life. On the other hand, we can let these things worry us; we can let situations and even persons take over, even over-whelm us. In those moments, we are each presented with a KRISIS, a decision to make. Again, if left unchecked, these worrisome feelings can blur our vision, confuse us and cause unnecessary worry and fear. I say, “unnecessary worry and fear,” because they are just that: unnecessary.

Our divine Lord is constantly telling His disciples, "Do not be afraid." Trust. In fact, some of His first words to them after the Resurrection on that first Easter Sunday were, "Peace be with you...I say it again, peace be with you." Trust. He says to Thomas on that second Sunday of Easter, "Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe." In other words, "Trust me. It is I." And today, on this Fifth Sunday of Easter, Jesus says to the disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God; have faith also in me." Trust. Trust that all of His words are true and can free you up to make a decision – a decision imbued with trust that all will be well in the end. The only thing to fear, we recall, is fear itself. And Jesus can say all of this because He is divine. "I am the way, the truth, and the life ... If you know me, then you will also know my Father ... for the Father and I are one."

So, stress is good. Worry is a waste; it's a waste of time. And time is precious for each of us as we pass through this vale of tears to a better time, an eternal time. We can all think things will always get better in this passing world; that's our hope, but the reality is so often different. We can think that life will return to the same way again after this crisis. No life can return to "the same normal" again after a crisis. In fact, that's the wonderful mystery of Crisis (Krisis): we are changed. And in that change which comes about because of a crisis, we have either opted to trust more deeply or not. That's what separates, in a respect, the "sheep" from the "goats"! The sheep, we heard in last week's Gospel, hear the voice of the good shepherd and attend to him; goats, on the other hand, stubbornly go their own way.

So, we are now in a crisis, a critical situation. In fact, many of us have been here before in one form or another: concerns about health, economy, relationships, marriage, children, work, etc. It's just that the current circumstances inflame the crisis; yet, the crisis is once again another opportunity for a decision. I will either decide to trust, or I will decide to give in to worry and all that it brings. "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

At every Mass, following the Lord's Prayer, the priest prays, "Deliver us, Lord, we pray from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress ..." Distress, is BAD stress; that's the worry, the anxiety, the overwhelming feeling that nothing can be done – the feeling of being lost in the wave which washes over. Freedom not from Stress, but from DIS-Stress. This is our prayer today and always. Free

us, O Lord, from every DIS-Stress. In other words, "Lord, help us by your grace to make a good decision in this KRISIS.

With all of that in mind and heart today, as we walk along alone or with others, raise your eyes up at the moment of the consecration at this Mass and make a good decision. Say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" Say with the disciples, "Lord, stay with us." Say with the Church for 2000 years, "AMEN! I believe!" We have so much to give thanks for today. Let our eyes be opened and recognize Him in the breaking of the bread, for the Bread that is broken is His Life for the world and the Wine becomes His Blood poured out for our sins. Yes, our Lord desires to have supper with us once again. And once again, Jesus wants us to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread as did those first disciples 2000 years ago. Here, at this Mass and every Mass offered until the end of time, Jesus remains closest to us He possibly can: Body to body and Blood to blood. If our eyes have become closed because of fear or doubt or despair, or for any other reasons, today let our eyes be opened again and recognize our Lord and our God who stays with us today and who stays with us through His Church always until we see Him face to face and behold Him in glorified Body and glorified Blood at the eternal banquet of heaven. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." You believe this. You've made a very good decision!

50 days of Easter joy to you! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!