

## **Easter Vigil – Easter Sunday - April 11-12, 2020**

This Holy Week we really have missed not being able to attend Mass, but also missed the very special rituals of Holy Week such as washing of feet, the veneration of the cross and the Easter fire.

However, last night and today we were still blessed to listen to some of the beautiful scripture readings that recall God's saving and merciful actions in behalf of the Israelites and all of us.

We heard how God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and then later again led Israel back from exile in Babylon. In these and many other stories we learn about God's merciful help for them and for anyone who turns back to him even after seriously turning away from him.

All of these stories prepare us for the greatest story of all – Jesus coming down from heaven to take on our humanity and our sins and bring us back to God through his death and resurrection.

That is what we are celebrating today – that God has delivered us not only from physical death and loss, but even more importantly has now in Jesus delivered us from eternal death and separation from God. In and through Christ's actions God has more than restored us to the life we had with him before the fall of Adam and Eve. On Good Friday, we heard that following the death of Jesus God tore the curtain in two that separated the people from holiest part of the temple. Now through Christ's cleansing of our sins a new closeness to God is possible.

What a grace we have through the gift of faith that even with our times of questions and doubts, deep down, with the with the help of the community of faith, the sacraments, and the experience of God in our prayers and life, we have confidence that, as God has always done for those trust in his love, he will at the proper time raise us up even now in our day from this deadly Covid-19 virus that is spreading through the world and through our communities, and will help us get through these difficult times.

In spite of the suffering and sacrifices and fears that we have, we also by the gift of faith are able to see rejoice with Easter joy at the goodness that is coming forth from so many. God has created all people good and given each person gifts to share for the good of others. So often we fail to share those gifts, but God uses times like this to try and draw that goodness and the gifts out of each person. We also see many people humbling themselves to recognize their weakness and turn to God for the help that only he can give. Seek what is above, says St. Paul, in today's reading from his letter to the Colossians.

God is drawing forth so much new life from the cross of the pandemic that our world is carrying these days. Nevertheless, we all need to be concerned about those whose hearts have been hardened for one reason or another and are not able to turn to God.

Over the centuries when crises like this happened, people of faith have always interpreted or understood such times to be an instrument of God to call us back to himself. Therefore, as much as we pray for an end to this pandemic -- we also need to be praying for those who yet need to open themselves God's call as well as helping each other renew and deepen our own faith.

How do we begin to help people get in touch with God?

The most important thing is take time to listen deeply to each of them and help them get in touch with themselves, and then little by little help them to see the goodness in themselves and then to see God in their life and in all that is happening.

We may be weak in faith and hope ourselves, but in sharing our stories and struggles of life and faith with each other we will discover the presence of God with us. And if God who loves us, is with us, what do we have to fear? --- Jesus told us that when he would be lifted up on the cross he would draw all people to himself. When we face and lift up our suffering and fears and accept their reality and our helplessness we will at the same time see how God is still very much present among us and working among us and through us.

As some have said --- it is such a grace of God that the timing of this crisis we are in has fallen where it has during this time of Lent and Holy Week and the coming of Spring and so much more.

Just this past week, Dr. Anthony Fauci, in a briefing, reported – “It is in the sense of deaths - a bad week. At the same time, as we’re seeing an increase in deaths, we’re seeing a rather dramatic decrease in the need for hospitalizations.”

One writer commenting on the Easter meaning of coronavirus said that it is more than fitting that the number of deaths from coronavirus should peak during Holy Week, and especially on Easter weekend. It is, he said, an expression of the meaning of Easter. Similarly, the news that more are leaving hospitals than entering is also a sign of Easter. The bad news of Good Friday was followed by the good news of Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan said, “After Christ was crucified it seemed we could never smile again .... But then came the Sunday called Easter! The sun – S-U-N – came up, and Son --- S-O-N – came out as He rose from the dead. Guess who had the last word? -- God!

Let us thank God that we have the grace of these Lenten and Easter days to help us persevere in faith, hope and love through these days of serious difficulties for all the world, **but most all**, let us pray that we can see and help all to see the power of Christ’s resurrection being poured out on our world to help all be transformed in the way that we live and that we might all enter into the new Kingdom way of living that Christ has shown us.