



A Reflection from Fr. H during Morning Prayers

As part of my prayers during this difficult time, I have been reflecting upon the times when God seems distant from us. The psalms that we pray reflect all our human experiences and attitudes, and many of the other biblical prayers do the same. Often, the people cry out when they feel that God is not there. At times, they ask if he is sleeping when they cry out to him. The image of Christ asleep in the boat while the apostles worry that they are going to drown is a subtle way that the gospel uses that image to show Christ's divinity.

These prayers appeal to our human fears. Our Blessed Lord Himself, while hanging on the cross, prayed the words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He who is closest to the Father knew what it was like to feel that the Father was distant from him at that moment.

In our current situation, God is distant from us in the sense that the things we most rely upon, the Sacraments, are shut away from us. The doors of our churches are locked, and the gatherings that give us so much hope and peace are now withheld from us. This state of affairs is, of course, necessary for the good of all, but that makes it no less painful. As a priest, I have the privilege of still being able to celebrate the Eucharist. Without the assembly to join with me, however, I find it harder to keep that sense of community. Now, within the Diocese of Pittsburgh, I find that I cannot, for the time being, celebrate the other sacraments that mean so much to us. Particularly at this holy time of the year, it is particularly difficult to be cut off from these powerful sources of God's grace.

The scriptural prayers that cry out at God's seeming absence also reflect the sense that God uses those moments to bring his people to a deeper faith. While I miss having a full assembly for the celebration of the Eucharist, for instance, I have found the private Masses to be a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the holiness of that which I celebrate. While I feel helpless to serve those in need, I remind myself through prayer that it is God who truly ministers to them. Furthermore, I believe even more strongly that, when all restrictions are lifted, we will find even greater joy in coming together again as the holy People of God.

I undertook to write this reflection partially as a way of offering hope to anyone who might read it. At the same time, I wrote it as a way of working through my own feelings. The news last night that our bishop had further tightened the restrictions caused me to feel cut off from the glories that God pours upon us. Yet again, God has used that sense of abandonment to show me that He is present at every moment. My faith is still weak enough that I will have to learn that lesson over and over again. At this moment, however, He is using this challenging time to bring me to the point where I can pray with Christ, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and that, like the author of Psalm 22, I can place my hope in God's ultimate answer. The Lord is doing so in such a way that, at the same time, he is again showing his love to me and to all of us.

Please know that, as helpless as I may feel to actually do anything, I keep all of you in my prayers. Confident that God will bring us through this particularly penitential Lent to see evermore clearly the glories of Easter, I assure you of my prayers. *Oremus pro invicem*, let us pray for one another.