

My dear people,

Greetings on the third full day of the mandatory Corona Virus shutdown. It seems so much longer already. Honestly, I don't know whether I am writing for you or for myself, trying (like everyone else) to get my head around all that is happening. Concern about the global pandemic is, in itself, enough to get us down, but the effects on the economy are likewise alarming. Recently, I was talking to one of our priests who has a family that operates a small restaurant. He called the home and asked for the husband, but his wife said he was down at the restaurant laying off most of the staff.

While our first concern is not materialistic, we cannot ignore the impact this shutdown will have on our budget. Our operating budget is based on a weekly income (from the Sunday offerings) around \$22,000. In a separate posting, I will address finances specifically and how you can continue to support the parish either by mailing in your tithes or electronic giving. In addition to our shortfall for the operating budget, we anticipate an increase of requests for help from people who have been temporarily laid off. The St. Vincent de Paul Society would be the appropriate group to process such requests and will need our support.

I also have concerns for you parents at home with children. Are you wondering how you will make it for these two weeks or longer? I do hope you can establish a regimen, a schedule for the day that includes homeschooling, recreation in small numbers, prayer and time away from media. For sanity's sake, stay informed, but turn off the 24 hour news cycle.

A single column could not possibly cover all the thoughts around this "new normal", but I would like to address one strain of criticism within the Church, i.e. "outrage" over the cancellation of Masses. Some of this is being fed by internet "theologians" who appear unwilling or incapable of finding any good in the Church today. For the present, we are working on a system to live stream Sunday Masses but not before March 29. Likewise, I am looking for safe ways to get the Sacraments to you, but think it best, for now, to maintain the social distancing as requested at least until April 1, then evaluate the situation.

In my early priesthood, I served in a parish where Holy Communion was distributed under both species at daily Mass and the priest then purified the chalice. After getting a new sore throat and cold every few weeks, I said something to the pastor about discontinuing the practice during cold season. He was a very prayerful and good priest, and replied, 'I don't see how the Lord would let us get germs when we receive His Precious Blood.' To which I replied 'Well, I think it a bit presumptuous that we would expect the Lord to suspend the laws of nature (in essence: perform a miracle) every time we receive Holy Communion.'

While I think the critics believe they are being very pious in their criticism, I also think it good to remind them that one can sin against virtue by excess.

Virtus in medias stat (Virtue stands in the middle) is the Latin expression. Virtue is the mean between two extremes of excess and defect. Typically, we think virtue is lacking when there is a defect of a quality, e.g. a defect of faith is disbelief; a defect of hope is despair. But we also offend against virtue by an excess of a quality. Those who want public Masses celebrated in this pandemic, should consider whether they are offending against faith by excess, i.e. superstition, or by an excess of hope (presumption on the mercy of God). And so my first response is to suggest the indignation is not virtuous!

Further, do not think the Church has abandoned the Sacrifice of the Mass. Mass is being offered worldwide, but privately. Remember the “Morning Offering”: “Oh, Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer Thee my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day ... in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world...” When I offer the Mass in private I know that your prayers, works, joys and sufferings are being joined to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, a much-needed offering in these troubled times.

And, no, the cancellation of public Masses is not some Modernist movement unheard of in history. If earlier ages did not cancel Masses, they also did not know about viruses and how they are transmitted. Centuries ago, church bells would be rung that the sound might ward off pestilence in the air. In the 1918 flu pandemic, local churches were all closed. I remember hearing about it as a child. This was before we all watched too much television and used to tell and listen to stories on the *piazza*. Someone had died of the flu in the house directly across from my family’s homestead. The person was Catholic. I asked whether they had a funeral if the churches were closed. ‘No, they had a small wake in the house and the priest came and said the prayers in the home.’

Yes, the Sacraments, especially Confession and Holy Communion bring us many graces and connect us to God. There are times, however, when we must forego our individual good for something hardly mentioned these days in this culture of the self: the common good.

Being deprived of the Eucharist is no small matter, but we can be thankful we don’t live in places where radical Moslem groups behead Christians or in China where the virus is not only rampant, but the Church is being persecuted. There are many places in the world that do not have Sunday Masses because they lack priests. Pray for vocations. Perhaps the worries of the present will inspire potential candidates for the priesthood and religious life to think more deeply about our values, what is transitory and what is lasting.

I encourage you to make spiritual Communion, inviting the Lord into your hearts spiritually even if you cannot receive Him sacramentally. Absence can make the heart grow fonder.

On a personal note, in case you are wondering, I am in the mountains of North Carolina being a patriotic American, practicing senior citizen social distancing. Actually, this was to be a quick trip which was scheduled over a month ago. I’ve learned how important it is to check on my fixer-upper cabin

once a month when possible. This was going to be a 3 or 4 day time to work quietly and get some pre-Holy Week rest. While I don't plan to spend the entire shut down here, I expect to stay through March 23. And I have learned something about myself with all this unexpected free time: all those tasks that I have not done because I was "too busy" were really things I didn't want to do (like clean out the ice box). Also, I have recommended a daily schedule for you because I don't do well without one myself. If allowed, God will draw good out of these crazy times. May He bless and sustain us all.

Saint Roch, pray for us, that we may be preserved from all diseases of body and soul.

Father McInerny