

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Laetare Sunday (John 9:1-41)

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind.” To this question, Jesus does not assign blame to anyone. Instead, He stated that this unfortunate situation, blindness from birth, would become an opportunity for God’s grace to be made visible. In essence, what Jesus is saying is this: “God can bring good out of bad situations.” We cling to this hope in these difficult times as we face the great scourge of the Corona virus, or covid-19. All of us have never seen anything like this; it’s a frightening reality. Who knows if our nation will follow the tragic path of such nations as Italy or Spain, where in mere days, hundreds have died from this pandemic. Its downright scary.

I believe that deep within every Christian heart, the question arises, “Where is God in the midst of all this suffering? Why is He doing this to us?” We must believe that God cannot cause or create evil; it is against His divine nature of love. We will know one day with certainty the origin of this virus, but it did not come from the hands of God. Goodness cannot create evil.

But that said, God may be *permitting* covid-19, or *allowing* it for a time, to bring about good in our world . . . a world increasingly marked by grave sin and wickedness. Let’s be honest . . . our world has become so depraved and we have turned far away from the Lord. How many innocent children have been dispatched in the womb by abortion? What about those states that recently allowed for abortion up to the very moment of birth? Some states are even debating killing children *after* birth . . . infanticide. When did the term “murder” not apply to innocent babies? Or how about the redefinition of marriage, which violates not only natural law but divine law as well? What part of, “A man shall leave his mother and father and cling to his wife” do we not understand? Scripture also tells us that “In the divine image He created them, male and female He created them?” So why as a society are we having these inane debates about transgender “girls” (who are boys) wanting to dress and shower in female locker rooms and compete in female sports? It’s an outrage and no one seems to speak up, especially on behalf of young women at risk. Then there’s the filth of pornography along with the abuse of children, in the society and in the Church. As for the Church, how many people have wandered from the Faith. Can God be pleased with empty churches on Sunday and a seeming disregard for the Holy

Eucharist, a gift that came to us by way of His great suffering on Mount Calvary? Could this covid-19 virus be a corrective measure, to make us turn back to God and to love Him and serve Him once again? I believe so. Many times in the Sacred Scriptures, when people turned away from the Lord, He *permitted* sufferings, so that when they suffered greatly, they would realize that the only way out of the misery was to turn back to God and His grace. The pestilence during the time of Phineas; the destructive seraph serpents at the time of Moses; the three days pestilence due to King David . . . all ended when the People of God repented and turned back to the Lord. I pray and hope that we don't rely solely on the medical experts, hoarding of supplies, social distancing, and the government to get us through this covid-19 crisis. We have to get down on our knees and return wholeheartedly to the Lord. If God lifted His hand and ended great sufferings for the people of old who repented then why would He not do so for us today?

This covid-19 crisis may also renew our love for what we have, but often neglect or take for granted . . . the practice of our Catholic Faith. This past week has been the lowest point of my priesthood . . . celebrating the Holy Mass to an empty Church, not being allowed to join you in Eucharistic Adoration, and not even allowed to visit the sick and shut-ins. Bishop Kagan has asked this of all priests and it is a heavy cross to bear. We, the shepherds of our flocks, are denied the great gift of serving our flocks; I carry this heaviness throughout my day. But, with this covid-19 crisis, perhaps we may grow in our awareness that for many Catholics worldwide, being denied the Sacraments and the Holy Mass is a constant lived reality: the underground Catholic Church of China, where a clandestine Mass can result in torture, imprisonment, and even death; the suffering Church of Syria, where there is no going to Mass because of snipers, bombs, and the killing of priests; or even "advanced" nations like India, where Hindu fundamentalist are torching Catholic churches and killing priests. We know that one day, the covid-19 virus will pass and we can go back to our churches for the Holy Mass. These other suffering Christians; who knows when they will be able to worship the Lord in security and peace. Maybe this covid-19 crisis will lead us to pray more fervently for the suffering Church; they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Maybe it will lead us to be more grateful and faithful for having access to the Lord in the gift of the Holy Eucharist. Isn't it sad that we often don't appreciate what we have until it is take away from us?

This covid-19 virus has brought our country and the world to its knees. But Christians live by hope; God is in control. He is permitting this for a time, but if we pray the Holy Rosary, spend time before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, repent, and do penance, He will in time lift this great suffering. In the words of the prophet Hosea regarding mankind, "I have humbled him, but I will prosper him" (Hosea 2:9). This crisis is horrendous, but God will bring much good out of this evil. We may question why we or other good people should suffer, but in the words of Blessed Archbishop Fulton Sheen, "The supreme law of Christianity is that the innocent pray for and suffer for the guilty." Jesus Christ did this on Mount Calvary and we, His disciples, must do the same. But, be assured, in this time of trial, mankind will repent and grow in holiness; we will be more mindful of suffering people, including those who suffer for their Catholic Faith; we will see what a great gift we have in the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Mass and never again take them for granted; Catholic households will be more prayerful and intent on growing in holiness; and the moral ills of our world will give way to God's beautiful plans for life, marriage, and human sexuality which He intended for all peoples and all times. Some day we may not use the word "crisis" when referring to covid-19. We may refer to this time as the time of "purification" and "spiritual renewal", when a physical sickness actually healed our *spiritual* sickness. As we pray time and time again in the *Our Father*, "Thy will be done". Now more than ever, we must cling to these words with great hope and trust.