

Grace never locked down

Right now a lot of folks are talking about the re-opening of churches.

Let's not forget: The *church* never closed. You can't lock up and shut down a living, breathing community of faith, even when there is no access to sacred buildings.

When gathering is restricted, prayer, the pondering of God's word, works of charity, and the sacraments continue, even in unconventional ways.

Right now we're grappling with something else: How to gather to celebrate the Eucharist in responsible ways that protect the health and well-being of everyone.

That goes to the heart of this Sunday's gospel: Jesus and (some) of his disciples are gathered in a medium sized upper room in Jerusalem (John 17:9-11). There are no perils of contagion or pandemics at the gathering.

But other threats are lurking: uncertainty, fear of persecution and violence are knocking on the door from the outside. More than a few have abandoned the community of disciples.

What's clear is that while being thoroughly challenged, that tiny

community *survived*. What's more, the community *learned*. And, that community *passed on the wisdom gained* to a second generation of Christians.

The coming months are likely to be very unconventional. Many aspects of our lives, including our participation at Mass are going to feel odd, strange. Some days will feel like we're living a science fiction movie.

Many will have to make difficult decisions as to how to best participate in the Mass, whether in person or in a common spirit of prayer, by remaining at home.

Whatever the case, what was true of that infant church gathered with Jesus in that upper room will be true of us:

We (the church) will survive.

We (the church) will learn.

We (the church) will pass on the lessons learned to another generation about to inherit the 21st century.

The Holy Spirit cannot be shut down. The grace of God cannot be confined, no matter how weird the time in which we live.

So, let's pray for a Spirit that sees beyond the limits that the present moment imposes.

Yearn for that Spirit, even when not much else feels normal or familiar anymore. It is that *Holy* Spirit that leads us forward.

Amen.