



SAINT JOSEPH

Maronite Catholic Church

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March 23, 2020

Feast of Saint Rafka



Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Joseph Church,

As we live through this very difficult time together —but “socially distant” — please see our parish website (sjmcc.org) for many useful links to excellent sources for spiritual reflection and prayer.

Also see our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/sjmccatl/>. If you click on Videos, you will find the Divine Liturgy for March 22, Stations of the Cross, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

March 23, Feast of Saint Rafka

Lord Jesus, make us worthy to celebrate the feast of your holy servant, Sister Rafka. You have given her to us as an example of carrying your cross and made her the patron of suffering. She repeated the words of the apostle Paul, “I know only Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Lord, may we carry the cross as she did, with faith, hope, and love, that with her we may attain what God has prepared for those who love him, that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived. We glorify you, your Father, and your Holy Spirit, for ever. Amen.

Spiritual Guidance

The coronavirus pandemic is confusing and frightening for hundreds of millions of people. That is not surprising. Many around the world are sick and many others have died. Unless the situation changes dramatically, many more will fall ill and die around the globe. This crisis raises serious medical, ethical and logistical questions. But it raises additional questions for people of faith. So I would like to offer some advice from the Christian tradition, Ignatian spirituality and my own experience.

Resist panic. This is not to say there is no reason to be concerned, or that we should ignore the sound advice of medical professionals and public health experts. But panic and fear are not from God. Calm and hope are. And it is possible to respond to a crisis seriously and deliberately while maintaining an inner sense of calm and hope. St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, often talked about two forces in our interior lives: one that draws us toward God and the other away from God. The one that draws us away from God, which he labeled the evil spirit, “causes gnawing anxiety, saddens and sets up obstacles. In this way it unsettles people by false reasons aimed at preventing their progress.” Sound familiar? Don’t lend credence to lies or rumors, or give in to panic. Trust what medical experts tell you, not those who fear monger. There is a reason they call Satan the “Prince of Lies.” Panic, by confusing and frightening you, pulls you away from the help God wants to give you. It is not coming from God. What *is* coming from God? St. Ignatius tells us: God’s spirit “stirs up courage and strength, consolations, inspirations and tranquility.” So trust in the calm and hope you feel. That is the voice to listen to. “Do not be afraid!,” as Jesus said many times.

Care for the sick. This pandemic may be a long haul; some of our friends and family may get sick and perhaps die. Do what you can to help others, especially the elderly, disabled, poor and isolated. Take the necessary precautions; don’t be reckless and don’t risk spreading the disease, but also don’t forget the fundamental Christian duty to help others. “I was sick, and you came to visit me,” said Jesus (Mt 25). And remember that Jesus lived during a time when people had no access to even the most rudimentary medical care, and so visiting the sick was just as dangerous, if not more, than it is today. Part of the Christian tradition is caring for the sick, even at some personal cost.

In addition, do not close your hearts to the poor and those who have no or limited healthcare. Refugees, the homeless and migrants, for example, will suffer even more than the general population. Keep your heart open to all those in need. Do not let your conscience become infected, too.

Pray. Catholic churches around the world are closing, with Masses and other parish services cancelled by many bishops. These are prudent and necessary measures designed to keep people healthy. But they come at some cost: For many people, this removes one of the most consoling parts of their lives—the Mass and the Eucharist—and isolates them even more from the community at a time when they most need support.

What can one do instead? Well, there are many televised and livestreamed Masses available, as well as ones broadcast on the radio. But even if you can’t find one, you can pray on your own. When you do, remember that you’re still part of a community. There is also the longstanding tradition in our church of receiving a “spiritual communion,” when, if you cannot participate in the Mass in person, you unite yourself with God in prayer. You can meditate on the Sunday Gospel on your own, consult a Bible commentary about the readings, gather your family to talk about the Gospel or call friends and share your experiences of how God is present to you, even in the midst of a crisis. The persecuted Christians in the early church prayed and shared their faith in the catacombs, and we can do the same. Remember that Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt. 18:20). Remember too that the church is not a building. It is the community.



Message from Pope Francis

Pope Francis has asked Christians around the world to unite in praying the Our Father prayer at noon on March 25 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. "In these days of trial, while humanity trembles at the threat of the pandemic, I would like to propose to all Christians to unite their voices to heaven," Pope Francis said. "I invite ... the leaders of all Christian communities, together with all Christians of various confessions, to invoke the Most High, Almighty God, while simultaneously reciting the prayer that Jesus Our Lord has taught us," he said following the Angelus prayer. March 25 is the Solemnity of the Annunciation, the date "when many Christians remember the Archangel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin Mary of the Incarnation of the Word," the pope said. "May the Lord hear the unanimous prayer of all his disciples who are preparing to celebrate the victory of the Risen Christ," he said. Pope Francis announced on Sunday that he will also preside over a moment of prayer with Eucharistic Adoration in an empty St. Peter's Square on Friday, March 27 at 6pm in Rome in which he will give the Urbi et Orbi blessing, usually reserved for Christmas, Easter, or other special occasions. He invited all Catholics to participate spiritually through the media and noted that all who join in this prayer will have the possibility of receiving a plenary indulgence if they meet the obligations laid out in [the decree issued March 20](#).

Message from Bishop Gregory Mansour

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Saint Jean-Marie Vianney once said "when we feel the love of God growing cold, let us instantly make a Spiritual Communion. When we cannot go to the church, let us turn towards the tabernacle; no wall can shut us out from the good God."

Below is a prayer composed to help us live in communion with one another during this time of social distancing. I invite you to pray this prayer when you feel the need to be in deeper communion with God and others, and to be of service to those who are most in need.

Prayer for Spiritual Communion

O Divine Ocean of Mercy and Compassion, be with us in our time of trial and difficulties. Today I make an act of spiritual communion with you, the Life-Giving Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At this time I am not able to receive the sacred body and blood of my Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, but I choose to live in union with him and in the unity of the Holy Spirit. I offer my day, my daily life, my joys and sorrows to you, for those around me, and for the whole world. Be with us O life-giving Triune God, for we know that nothing in this world has power over us. O Lover of all people, have mercy on us and on the whole world.



Sunday, March 29

Healing of the Blind Man

Mark 10:46-52 New International Version (NIV)

Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.