

So, as I said at the beginning of Mass,
this is St. Pius's first attempt at online worship.

We've never done anything like this before.

It's something we've talked about and wished for,
but hadn't moved forward on.

But as they say, "*be careful what you wish for*".

And I'll be honest with you, attempting this presented some challenges.

Any time you introduce new technology or need to rely on the internet
you discover things that are out of your control.

But we're doing the best we can in this 'new normal'.

We've never seen anything like this before:

borders closed, travel stopped, nations on lockdown,
and daily life as we know it grinding to a halt.

The coronavirus is changing everything.

Changing our world, our worship, and changing me & you, over and over.

Just when you think you might you've got a handle on this crisis and
make plans, it all changes....some new restriction or forecast is announced.

In the midst of this crisis, it's easy to feel like we're all
stumbling around in the dark - struggling to see the way forward.

It's how I've been feeling and probably you too.

We don't know what's coming and that can make us
worried, fearful, and doubtful.

Maybe you've found your sleep is off, or your peace of mind disturbed,
maybe you're more irritable.

Maybe you've been coping by stockpiling supplies or cleaning frantically.

If you're like me, maybe you're checking the news or your email endlessly.

We're doing anything we can to exert some control over something
we can't control - not really.

None of us wanted this crisis, but it's here.

I believe that in this moment we are being given an opportunity to
be renewed in faith and to rediscover our purpose in life.

And when we do, we will clearly see our way forward

- we will find the way to God and others.

SCREEN: Spring Cleaning main screen

A month ago, our parish began our Lenten message series titled, Spring Cleaning, which reminds us that Lent is a time to do some spiritual spring cleaning, to clear out whatever may be cluttering up our souls.

And now a month into Lent, and facing the challenges of the pandemic, we heard how we can surrender our lives to God so we can return to him with our whole hearts.

Today's Gospel told us how.

SCREEN: blank red background

Now, to really understand what took place with Jesus's healing of the man born blind,

you need to know how people back then looked at blindness.

If someone was born blind, they were seen as cursed by God.

Jewish law said a blind man couldn't serve as a priest.

If someone was blind, they had no control - no ability to earn a living - so they were considered a burden to their families and often reduced to a life of begging.

With today's pandemic, we are all learning about the need for 'social distancing', but in Jesus's day - out of ignorance - people practiced 'spiritual distancing' - they avoided the blind, the lame, the lepers, the foreigner, and the sinner.

But not Jesus.

Listen again to how Jesus healed the blind man:

SCREEN: Jesus spat on the ground

and made clay with the saliva,

and smeared the clay on his eyes,

and said to him,

"Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" —which means Sent—.

So he went and washed, and came back able to see. - John 9

Talk about a lack of social distancing!

This was about as close and intimate as you could get to someone.

So, why did Jesus do what no one else could or would do?

Because Jesus looked upon the man born blind with love;

he saw a child of God, a brother in need of healing.

Jesus broke down the barriers, the walls and

the prejudices of his day to give sight to someone in need.

It was an amazing miracle, an incredible cause for rejoicing.

But how sad that the Pharisees missed God's presence in

this miracle because it didn't fit their understanding of how God worked

- they couldn't control it, had no power over it.

When Jesus healed the blind man, it was clear: God was in control here!

Now, put yourself in the place of the man who was healed.

What would you have done with your new vision and life of freedom?

Go find work so you wouldn't have to beg anymore?

Enjoy the pleasures you'd missed out on?

The blind man could have done all that, but instead

he returned to Jesus to discover more about him and he professed Jesus as Lord.

He became a follower; which meant surrendering control of his life back to Jesus.

So from this situation of blindness, hopelessness and brokenness,

we don't just see the healing of one person,

but a vision of how God can take any tragedy, any crisis,

any sense of hopelessness and transform it

- giving it meaning and purpose and hope.

It reminds me of the verse in St. Paul's letter to the Romans when he wrote this:

SCREEN: We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. -Romans 8: 28

All things work for good for those who love God.

This pandemic is not a punishment from God.

It's not a punishment.

What it is, for us as disciples, is a grace-filled opportunity for goodness

and greatness - for us to rediscover our purpose in life.

But to receive the grace, we have to be like the man Jesus healed; we have to surrender our lives to God and turn to others.

So how can you and I do this right now?

Let me mention a couple ways.

SCREEN: embrace the sacrifices

In the face of this crisis, each of us has a choice to make.

We can get angry and frustrated and upset because our lives have been upended OR we can embrace the sacrifices we're making.

And I don't want to minimize the sacrifices in any way - the disruptions to our daily routine and personal freedom are massive.

But as disciples, we must embrace them.

And that means admitting, we aren't in control right now.

We can see them as Lenten sacrifices even though they aren't the ones you or I promised on Ash Wednesday.

I shared with you when Lent began how much I look forward to it.

And this year we had so many great things planned for all of you.

That's all on hold now... it will have to wait until next year.

This is the Lent we've been given and the reality we have so let's embrace the sacrifices.

SCREEN: pray

And second, we can pray.... *we need to pray.*

We need to pray to God every day and often throughout the day for wisdom and guidance.

Pray for surrender, pray for trust, and pray believing that God is in control of this crisis and every crisis.

Isn't that the lesson the man who was healed learned, and the lesson the Pharisees missed?

God is in control, so we need to pray asking God to help us surrender.

We can pray for healing for those who are sick and dying from this pandemic anywhere in the world.

We can pray for those who are separated from loved ones

- like those in facilities who can't have visitors,

as well as those affected by the closings and cancelations.

We can pray for medical professionals and first responders - those on the front lines - who are in harm's way helping others.

For the past few weeks we've been sharing with you a prayer for the coronavirus written by Kerry Weber, a great Catholic writer.

You can find it on our website and I've attached it to the end of the text of this message.

I'm asking you to join me and commit to praying it everyday at 4pm.

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, stop at 4pm and pray this prayer.

So that's second, pray.

SCREEN: be generous

And then third, we can all be as generous as possible in helping others in need right now.

We must be self-less not selfish.

Don't just Netflix or Hulu your way through this crisis, instead, reach out to family and friends, to neighbors and parishioners - especially those who might be vulnerable, isolated or alone.

Many people are worried and afraid.

A phone call, a text or email can alleviate someone's concerns and help them know they are not alone.

And if you know someone who is at higher risk and shouldn't be going out, maybe you could pick up their groceries when you go shopping.

And when you are shopping think about helping us keep our Sharing Pantry stocked.

We are receiving extra requests for help right now, so we need your help.

Since our weekend Masses are cancelled,

you can drop off your Sharing Pantry donations

on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 8am-2pm at the bin which has been moved to the school entrance.

And please be generous by keeping up your financial support to the parish.
Your support provides our employees with their salaries and benefits and
enables us to keep serving you and all those in need.
And finally stay connected to us.

SCREEN: spxbowie.org

You can find and share this message and all our resources through our website,
spxbowie.org

And look for another worship video next week.

So, to end how I began when I said,

“we’ve never seen anything like this before”

the good news is that nothing surprises God.

And we can be certain that even if we don’t what lies ahead,

God does, and we are not helpless because God is with us.

So let’s resolve today to not give in to fear,

to not surrender to the darkness.

Instead, let's choose to be hopeful and generous and loving,

that we may be renewed in faith and rediscover our purpose in life. Amen. +

A Coronavirus Prayer by Kerry Weber

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.”

At your command, the sick were made well.

Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus,

that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus.

May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together

and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to

a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus.

May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died.

As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair.

May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process.

May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations.

Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the wellbeing of the people they are meant to serve.

Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks.

May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare.

In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. Jesus Christ, heal us. Amen.