

Thoughts in the Time of Covid-19--#1, March 23, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters:

I hope this finds you well. We are living in challenging times, some of us struggling with the isolation imposed by safeguards against the Corona Virus. In response to this new reality, I have received a great number of communications about what I (or the church or the priests...) should or should not do.

I have decided to begin a daily message to keep in touch with you. These will be posted in English and French each day on our Alexandria-Cornwall and Ottawa diocesan websites. Let's pray for one another and practice the suggestions of our civic officials and health authorities.

Today I had to take the unparalleled step of closing all our churches even to private prayer in response to the orders to the Eastern Ontario Health Authority. Though few individuals were coming to the churches, their being open represented easy access to the Lord and comfort in this moment of need. Now, even that has been taken from us, but let us recall that the Lord knows what he is about in allowing this to take place.

Though we have more time on our hands, if you're like me and others I know, we find that it's difficult to pray right now. So, we may each be asking one another, what can I do? For many this is a difficult time made more challenging by not being able to come to church, to receive Holy Communion and to gather with our church family or with friends. We know we can pray anywhere but it is difficult to pray when we are anxious and not able to be together to pray.

What can we do? May I suggest one practical thing that may help? The Rosary is a great rhythm of prayer that one can pray when we struggle to find our own words or when we are feeling anxious or distracted.

The prayers of the Rosary provide us with the words and the meditations of each mystery give us a brief instance taken from the life of Our Lord or His Blessed Mother's to give us a focus for a few moments. When we lack the words, the prayers of the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be to God "carry us".

On Wednesday, we will celebrate the mystery of the Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel greeted Mary and told her she was "full of grace" and that the Lord was "with her". Gabriel asked Mary to become the Mother of the Saviour of the world. And Mary said, "Yes" — "Let it be done to me according to your word". This is called the first Joyful Mystery, which is followed by the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, the Birth of the Child Jesus, His Presentation in the Temple and Mary and Joseph Finding the Lost 12-Year Old Jesus in the Temple.

So much of the life of the Holy Family resonates with our own family lives! You see, we can offer our Rosary for those we love and miss, for our friends that we cannot see in person, for our church family and friends and for those who are suffering. It is a great prayer!

By the way, you shouldn't worry if you find yourself distracted while praying the Rosary. Just refocus and offer the distraction to the Lord (a sense of humour too can help — "there I go again wandering in my thoughts Lord. Sorry! I'm back!") Our Lord understands and he values our efforts to pray especially when it is hard for us.

Wouldn't it be great, during these times when we are homebound, if we could make an effort to pray the Rosary together each day? That could be true even though we might not be physically together: we could make an arrangement with family or friends and fellow parishioners to pray the Rosary at a particular time each day (say at 9AM, or noon, or 7PM)?

When we pray, we are united to each other through Jesus Christ no matter where we are! Let's give it a try. May Our Blessed Mother intercede for us.

God bless you.

✠ Terrence