

Thoughts in the Time of Covid-19--#3, March 25, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

During these days when public Masses are not possible, we are experiencing a “fast” from the Eucharist. In a striking commentary, Pope Benedict XVI in his writings reflected on the ancient tradition of the Church of not communicating on Good Friday. He also mentioned that when he sensed his death approaching, St. Augustine undertook penances for his sins and fasted from the Eucharist so as to identify himself with sinners who could not receive Holy Communion. “Augustine wanted to meet his Lord in the humility of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for him who is the Righteous and Merciful One...”

So, we can draw spiritual profit from our fasting which is not freely chosen but imposed on us out of a concern for the well-being of others. We can embrace it out of solidarity with the many people in the remote parts of our country who can attend Mass or receive Holy Communion only rarely. Or in lands where there are few priests as in Amazonia.

“A fasting of this kind—and of course it would have to be open to the Church’s guidance and not arbitrary—could lead to a deepening of a personal relationship with the Lord in the sacrament,” Joseph Ratzinger wrote in *Behold the Pierced One*. Let’s embrace this spiritual vision in these days.

Many of us are also unable to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation because of the need for “social distancing” these days. So, some Catholics worry about this and ask, “What do I do about Confession? Are my sins forgiven?”

For many, it is a difficult time because of the desire to go to individual confession. How can we do that and keep everyone safe from potentially encountering and then spreading the CV-19 virus? This is a big question. The reality is any individual encounter for Confession has to be in close proximity and if many people come to Confession we risk gathering people in numbers and thus exposing them to greater risk.

Recently, Pope Francis gave instructions through the Vatican Congregation in charge of the Sacrament of Penance (also known as Confession) for this difficult time.

If we cannot go right now to individual Confession we are told: “where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by... the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452).” (Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic, March 20, 2020)

In simpler language, if we cannot go to Confession, then confessing our sins to God out of our love for him with a sincere desire for forgiveness and the intention to avoid sin and to go to individual confession as soon as it is possible, God forgives us our sins. God is just and merciful. He sees our love for Him and He knows our desire for forgiveness.

So, when the churches can be opened again and priests can hear confessions, come and experience once more the grace of hearing “your sins are forgiven, go in peace!”

In closing, I ask our Catholics here in Eastern Ontario to embrace this spiritual sacrifice of being deprived of the Eucharist and Confession together, with the intention of an end to the spread of the Coronavirus, for the healing of those afflicted by it, and for strength for those who are providing care for the afflicted. May our present Eucharistic fast draw us closer to our Lord and nurture in us an intense hunger and new appreciation for the Blessed Sacrament.

God bless you.

✠ Terrence