

## **Look upon the Lord for hope, strength and grace: ‘God sets before us what we need’**

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We feel a sense of control if we can describe something and predict an outcome. Ancient people weren't so sure, often humbled by the elements of earth, wind, water and fire. These things thwart our certainties also. The baptistry at my last parish had one stained glass window for each element.

These days, hurricanes and COVID-19 impact our society. We have control if we stay away from them. Their effects are everywhere. After all these months, it is good to remind ourselves that uncertainty does not equal a defect in our makeup. There are differences of opinion about whether certain effects could be avoided, but no life is totally without them. There are things that are within our reach, especially the strengths of faith and moral living. The readings for the 28th Sunday remind us that God sets before us what we need. In stressful times, there are temptations to think otherwise, or to think that God does not offer enough. It will be the basics of grace that will cement families and human communities. It is reasonable to be unhappy with prolonged uncertainty. It is not reasonable to despair because we mistakenly believe that uncertainty is an injustice altogether. People will argue whether someone is to blame for not mitigating foreseeable hardship, and arguments can produce better future approaches. But for the present, the wind and the rain, forest fires, earthquakes and epidemics will temper our desire for certainty.

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Pope Francis' encyclical letter to “all the brothers” (Tutti Fratelli—a phrase used by St. Francis) is a lengthy faith reflection on the bonds of charity. Those of us who remember chromed automobile bumpers will recall the popular sticker “Jesus is the answer.” Decades ago, Swiss theologian Karl Barth wrote that Jesus is the question rather than the answer. Certainly by chapter two of his latest encyclical, the Holy Father reflects on Jesus in this way, and on Jesus' own questions quoted in the Scripture. Jesus, who is the physician of souls (Mt. 9:2), knows the importance of asking the right questions in pursuit of a healing. The pope offers his own responses, while opening a loving and hopeful path for the Lord to converse directly with each of us. You can access the multi-language text of the letter on the Vatican website.

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In personal conversations, and lately in written correspondence, people mention our diocesan priests' vow of poverty. This is incorrect. Diocesan or secular priests do not take such a vow. Order priests such as Franciscans or Dominicans do so within a different structure of life and their ‘charism.’ Diocesan priests receive a salary and benefits, pay taxes and social security, and can own personal property (for example, a vehicle) which is also taxed. Salaries are not high, but housing and rectory food are provided. Our priests know to plan for retirement for which they receive a modest monthly pension which is fully available by age 73. Priests have their own savings and earnings. They are entitled to Social Security and Medicare benefits. Now and then there is need of long term disability benefits for which the diocese is insured, and are provided to a priest free of charge. The diocese has a human resources department that can help individual priests to navigate these various resources. Catholic people should know that our priests personally contribute to diocesan appeals and other charities. And while I have never taken a

survey, I know that I am not the only priest using Sunday envelopes or electronic fund transfers to support my parish.

Can I give a good reason to write about priests' finances other than to give information? Yes. I believe it would be unfortunate if a man does not inquire about a vocation to diocesan priesthood because he or his family believe it will lead to poverty or total lack of autonomy.