

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, ... When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand...When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near” (Lk: 21: 25a, 28,31).

In these difficult times, we have seen untold suffering. Over 60.6 million infections. Over 1.4 million deaths worldwide due to the coronavirus. Massive unemployment. Businesses on the verge of bankruptcy. Millions and millions who are hungry. Storms, and floods coming one after another at an alarming pace. Raging, uncontrollable fires. How do we stand erect and raise our heads?

In these difficult times, we have seen countless acts of heroic virtue. Doctors and nurses and health care workers are on the front lines. Postal workers, grocery store clerks, teachers, all pitching in despite the personal risk to their own health. Citizens participating in democracy at record numbers to cast votes even if it involved waiting patiently in long lines and coming out of the security of home. Food banks feeding the hungry in record numbers. Generous support for our churches and other charitable organizations.

In these difficult times, everyone is called to put differences aside and work for the common good. Great change is possible and yet we see great tension. Wearing masks saves lives ... and the defiant breathe freely while claiming it is all a hoax. Limiting travel has had great benefits for the environment let alone the effect to limit the spread of the virus ... and yet each holiday, Memorial Day, July 4th, Thanksgiving we see the desire to live freely once again exponentially increasing the spread of the virus. Vaccines have been developed at warp speed ... and yet government grid lock is evermore frustrating.

In these difficult times, we need God more than ever. The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus show us that any and every evil can be defeated. Death no longer is defeat, the chains on the gates of the nether world are broken. “And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (Mt 27:51-52).

In these difficult times we need to repent. Repentance involves acknowledging our own sinfulness rather than pointing out the sins of others. Repentance involves contrition, true sorrow for the harm we have done to ourselves, to our relation with God, and to others. Repentance involves humility. We humbly come before God seeking forgiveness from the font of God’s infinite mercy and paying it forward to those who have trespassed against us. Repentance involves penance as we work to restore, rebuild, and repair the damage we have done. Repentance involves a firm purpose of amendment to chart a new path forward away from sin and towards God.

In these difficult times we know neither the hour nor the day when the Lord will return. We are therefore called to be ever vigilant. We keep oil for our lamps by corporal and spiritual works of mercy. We look and listen for the pleas of human hearts who are suffering, and we respond to their needs, their hopes, their anxieties, and expectations.

In these difficult times, it is all too easy to isolate, to be selfish, and to turn inward. We are at our best when we sacrifice for the good others. Each of us must respond with the love of Christ for our neighbors. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another” (Jn 15:13-14, 16-17).