



MAY JESUS CHRIST BE PRAISED!

MAY 24, 2020 / ASCENSION

Spiritual Ponderings:

Corona Virus & the Sacraments - Part IV

I am using an article that I read to guide my reflections on the Church and the Corona Virus. The article is called: "Epidemic Danger and Catholic Sacraments" and was written by a theologian named Thomas Joseph White. I felt God asking me to use this article as a stepping off point for my own reflections on what this strange time of "social distancing" means for the Church. Quotes from his article will be in bold and my commentary and reflections will be in normal font. *Thomas Joseph White, O.P., is director of the Thomistic Institute in Rome.*

We might ask, what should we be doing as a Church in this time, one that is extremely trying for a great number of people, both religious and non-religious alike? Currently around 1800 to 2000 people are dying in the U.S. daily from this virus, the vast majority of whom would not have died if it had not broken out three months ago. These are not mere statistics. These are people's parents, brothers and sisters, children, friends, and loved ones... Currently priests like myself (father lives in Rome) are being contacted daily by people struggling with the illness or with the death of loved ones. We are living in a time that is deeply troubling for many of our fellow human beings. Are we ready to share our faith like never before? Are we willing to help people mourn? Will we be there to comfort them? I am trying to think of ways that I can help people. How can you bring Christ's love to those around you. In this context the instinctual move of some conservative Christian commentators to practice social criticism while fomenting division among priests, bishops, and laity is spiritually corrosive. (What does it do to a priest's soul, by the way, when we incite him to break the vow he made to God to obey his bishop?) Nor is it helpful to utter the tone-deaf claim that the COVID-19 pandemic is not so bad and that people are overreacting. People are not overreacting when they grieve as their patients, friends, or family members die by the thousands. In fact, the Christian message in this context is one of basic evangelical hope. What we are to learn first in this crisis is that there is life after death, that God loves those who die, that there is the possibility of the forgiveness of sins, that our littleness in the face of death is also an opportunity for surrender, that Christ too died alone from asphyxiation and that he was raised from the dead, that God can comfort the fearful, and that there is a promise of eternal life. In the face of death, Christians should be precisely those who put first things first.

I would like to respond to the above quote with two quotes from Helen Alexander's book: *Experiencing Bereavement*:

Death, no matter how it comes—whether expected or completely out of the blue—is an outrage. It can shake us to our very core and make us question the purpose of life itself. Why are we born, if only to die? Why love, if it only results in pain? How can someone be here one minute and irrevocably gone the next?

Death makes us question the meaning of life itself. It also stirs up all kinds of strong and overwhelming emotions: anger at the person who has died; resentment at the apparent unfairness of it all—"Why me? I've never done anyone any harm"; guilt at all the things that happened over the years, which resulted in arguments; or guilt again at having taken that person for granted.

Yet death is inextricably a part of life. On an intellectual level we all know about death and way, wryly, "Well, the one thing for certain about life is death." But on an emotional level, death appalls us. It takes from us people who are part of our lives, and it removes from us people that we love. We might have faith that we will see our loved ones again, or we might believe that we will

never see them again. Either way we are left with a sense of uncertainty. And in the meantime, life goes on and somehow we need to live without the person or people whom death has stolen from us.

The process of adapting to profound feelings of loss, of dealing with an overwhelming sensation of grief, and of beginning to live again is known as bereavement.

and

In Jesus' life on earth we see God caring deeply about the things that make human being hurt—sickness, being a social outcast, being lost. In his life, his ministry, and his death, Jesus shows us a God who is with us in our pain, and who knows our being at its very worst.

The message of Jesus is a simple one: heal the sick, accept the outcast, and find the lost. In other words, love one another, just as your Father in heaven loves you.

Time after time, though, that message is ignored, and some of the most tragic sequences in human history have resulted—not from a vengeful God determined to punish his erring people, but from our own willfulness and selfishness.

Suffering is not the opposite of love, but rather an integral and productive part of it.

So let us value life—all of it. Life is a gift from God. As we laugh and cry, love and argue, let us live it as fully as we can. We can't hoard it; we can't lock it in a safety deposit box. We never know when it may end. And on the days when the pain of loving caused by death seems too much to bear, we can draw courage from the knowledge that God shares it all with us. He mourns with us, he strengthens us, and he helps us prepare for the day when we, too, will enter into the glory of the kingdom that lies beyond this world. Then, we will fully understand why we are born, and live and die.



May 24 2020 – Ascension → The Ascension of the Lord → Lectionary: 58 → Gospel MT 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Spiritual Reflection: Jesus did not abandon us as orphans. Instead Jesus allows us the freedom to follow him or not. Like a teacher who decides to no longer do the work for his or her student but gives them a chance to succeed or fail on their own.

Spiritual Questions

1. Imagine you are present when Jesus goes to heaven, what are the apostles' reaction?
2. You received the Holy Spirit at your baptism. What does this mean to you?
3. How do you handle God's perceived absent?
4. What was the last inspiration you received from the Holy Spirit?
5. How does the Ascension fit into the Paschal mystery?



Sunday

You are rewarded not according to your work or your time but according to the measure of your love. - St. Catherine of Siena

Monday

He will provide the way and the means, such as you could never have imagined. Leave it all to Him, let go of yourself, lose yourself on the Cross, and you will find yourself entirely. - St. Catherine of Siena

Thought of the Day

- Tuesday** To the servant of God... every place is the right place, and every time is the right time. - St. Catherine of Siena
- Wednesday** Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring. - St. Catherine of Siena
- Thursday** God is closer to us than water is to a fish. - St. Catherine of Siena
- Friday** We are of such value to God that He came to live among us... and to guide us home. He will go to any length to seek us, even to being lifted high upon the cross to draw us back to Himself. We can only respond by loving God for His love. - St. Catherine of Siena
- Saturday** Ponder the fact that God has made you a gardener, to root out vice and plant virtue. - St. Catherine of Siena

PRO-LIFE



May 2020

We pray that the Lord, whose word is upright and whose works are trustworthy, may inspire everyone especially leaders of nations to proclaim the sanctity of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

For those who have gone astray like sheep, especially our love ones, that the shepherd and guardian of their souls, our Lord Jesus Christ, may find them and bring them home. Amen.



St. Monica Society

Please join us in praying a special prayer each month for Catholics who have fallen away from their faith.

Catholic Prayers

Lord Jesus, in this Easter season we celebrate today your Ascension to God's right hand as the goal of your resurrection from the dead. We thank you that you have not left us orphans, because you remain with us to the end of time. May we always be glad when we think of the many ways you are with us to the end of time. May we always be glad when we think of the many ways you are with us: in the Eucharist, in your Word, in one another, in your ministers. May we respond to your presence by keeping your commandments, above all, to love one another as you have loved us. - Amen.