

From the Pastor—April 19, 2020

The Humanity of it All Jesus Christ became man, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again. These two sentences summarize who we are as Christians and to Whom we belong. These sentences are great reminders for us to live by in these upside-down times of Covid-19 and the restrictions placed upon our lives. I share with you the experience of living through this together. Priests are not exempt from following the rules given us by our rightful civic and healthcare leaders. As you read my words, please know that you are not alone in however you may be feeling, be it feelings of loneliness, isolation, irritation, even almost clinical anxiety. Some may feel grateful for the time spent with your families. Some may even feel that “hey, home-schooling is not as bad as I always thought it was!” Wherever you are on the spectrum, I am with you. And I need you, too, because I am at varying places on the humanity spectrum. As communities of faith at St. Mary’s, Aurora, and St. Joseph’s, Giltner, let’s try to be with each other, for each other, all the while laser-focused upon our Savior, Jesus Christ, who we celebrate at Eastertide as having given us the great gift of salvation.

Our Charity, Our Stewardship Through this time of testing, and pain, our ability to be charitable stewards of our resources will be vital to the thriving of our families, our community, our parish, and our diocese. It is important to remember from Scripture that “God loves a cheerful giver.” We have a need to give before we have a cause to give to. At the level of our Parish Council and Finance Council of St. Mary’s, and with keeping all decision-making grounded in the needs and abilities of St. Joseph’s, I am leading several initiatives as described here:

SBA Loans SBA stands for the “Small Business Administration.” Our parishes can apply for a loan through this program as approved by Congress and signed into law by President Trump last month. This loan is forgivable if certain conditions are met. The Diocese of Lincoln has encouraged parishes to apply to receive this loan; trusted, knowledgeable parishioners have advised me on how to apply for it. The loan, if received, would give eight weeks of funding toward payroll and benefits. It could also be used for payment of utility expenses. Some of you may feel uncomfortable in seeking this funding; I share your sentiment. Yet, it seems that it would protect in the short-term our valued employees who serve both parishes. It also protects me, as your pastor, because the parishes pay for my monthly salary of \$1,900/month, as well as my health insurance.

Temporary Operating Loan The Diocese has a limited amount of resources to help parishes and schools. We hope to not have to apply for this loan, especially as St. Mary’s is nearing the finish line of paying off our debt from our 2014 renovation and parish hall addition.

On-line Giving At this time when public Masses are suspended, the means of collecting your donations is in flux. At St. Mary’s, the giving basket which is normally brought up at offertory has been placed at our main entrance. Some of you have stopped by and dropped in your envelopes. I have picked these up a couple times per day. What would be very helpful, at least temporarily, is if parishioners would consider giving to our parishes on-line. We have an “on-line giving” button on our web site: stmarysaurora.org. You can enter

your donations as for St. Mary’s or for St. Joseph’s. It is simple to set up giving from your checking account, or a credit card. You can choose this mode of giving for a temporary time and then go back to envelope giving when public Masses resume.

Parish Savings St. Joseph’s in Giltner is blessed with a savings account in the diocesan bank, called the Diocesan Investment and Loan (DIAL). I think most parishioners of St. Joseph’s would agree, we would want to avoid dipping into savings, *if possible*.

Charity and Stewardship Appeal The Diocese of Lincoln for almost 50 years has directed the Charity and Stewardship Appeal, formerly called the DDP (Diocesan Development Program). This appeal funds major ministries at the diocesan level which benefit all of us, ministries which on their own resources could not thrive as they do. One example of a ministry supported by the CSA (Charity and Stewardship Appeal) is the televised Mass on Sundays. Another beneficiary is the Newman Center at UN-L. Giving to the CSA also benefits the parishes, for when we reach the goal given us by the diocese, all the overage funds are rebated directly back to our parishes. The goal this year for St. Mary’s is \$9,110; for St. Joseph’s, it is \$1,750. The CSA is being conducted by mail this year, because of Covid-19 and the public suspension of Masses. I have sent a first wave of appeal letters to you; be looking for a second wave to come to your mailbox through the U.S. Postal Service.

IRA’s, Tax Rebates, KC annuities, Grain & Livestock, Stimulus Checks, Creative Generosity Some of you in the past, and very recent past, have named our parishes as beneficiaries of your IRA’s. The Knights of Columbus allows parishes to be named beneficiaries of funds you have invested with them. Some of you may receive tax rebates, or the extraordinary monies designated by the CARES act which Congress passed and President Trump signed, which will provide many Americans a stimulus check during this Covid-19 time of testing in our nation. Others, recently, have made one-time donations of substantial amounts which are very vital to helping our parishes meet our obligations. One option, which depends on the timing of your crop and livestock production, is that when you sell grain or livestock, you can make the funds (of whatever amount you choose) go directly to our parish, which helps you as a tax write-off.

Lots to consider I am far from being a business or finance guru. But I understand most of what I have written here, and I know that your generosity is to the Lord, not to me personally. If you have questions, I will try to answer them. I am working on a weakness of mine, that is, responding timely to e-mails, texts, and phone messages. Always, a phone call is the most direct way to gain my attention to your situation or concern.

Divine Mercy Sunday I will celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday today, April 19th, as I am best able to. I don’t have exact plans on what it will look like; video streaming the Adoration and the Chaplet on Facebook is certainly a probability. For those of you familiar with the promises of Divine Mercy, going to Confession is a beautiful component of our Savior’s dictation to his “secretary of Divine Mercy,” Saint Faustina of Poland. I will try to provide Confessions. Be looking for an e-mail as to how and when and where.

The Spanish Flu Much has been said about the Covid-19 pandemic by way of comparison with the Spanish Flu. One of the enduring memories of my Grandpa Grell, who

died in 1990 at age 95, was that he served our nation during World War I. He was stationed at Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, and he took care of Spanish Flu victims without himself getting sick. In my Mom and Dad's safety deposit box in Beatrice, we have the papers by which my grandpa (we called him "Bopper") was conscripted (if that's the right word?) into duty for the Great War. He was in for only about three months, September through December, of 1918. My other grandpa, Mom's dad, was preparing to serve in World War I but it ended before he could be called up. His youngest brother, my great-uncle, later served in World War II, helping the U.S. to liberate the then-Czechoslovakia by helping to translate Czech and English. *** Another point about the Spanish Flu that is apt for our time is that many bishops suspended public Masses. Our Chancery in Lincoln sent us copies of old newspaper articles which give details of these suspensions.

Plagues and Famines I have been reading quite a few articles on Catholic media about Church history with plagues and famines. One occurrence was the Black Plague in the 1300's, which saints like Catherine of Siena responded heroically to. In much of Italy during the 1500's, plagues ran rampant. True stories are told of St. Charles Borromeo in his Diocese of Milan holding Mass in the street so that onlookers could see and hear the Mass from their residences. Many of you have studied the Irish Potato Famine, which drove many of our ancestors to flee the Emerald Isles to come to America.

Not an Expert I don't pretend to be an expert in the Spanish Flu or other plagues and famines. It just seems apt to mention that, historically, these times have come upon the world before, and the Church has reacted before to assist the people of God with providing hope.

Bottom Line Our bottom line, in whatever the circumstance, is the salvation of souls, of your own soul and of as many souls whom you can influence. We all want Heaven, no matter what happens in our earthly lives.

Myself, My Parents As of this writing, I continue to experience good health. My parents, too, are doing well on our family farm. My siblings and I have considered whether to (firmly) ask Mom and Dad to move into Beatrice to an assisted living facility. At this time, we are glad that they are on the farm so as not to be restricted to a facility. Of course, some could rightly say that they would still be better off to be in a strict quarantine with health care workers providing them assistance. But their health, for ages 92 and 84, is relatively good. And I have enlisted a "guardian angel" from our parish in Beatrice to go on grocery runs for my parents. This woman, whose own mother is 96 and lives in an apartment, has been a real godsend. I am sure there are others who would be willing to help. Have you, too, either helped others or been beneficiaries of people's assistance in these weeks? I think one strong takeaway from times of hardship is that we show our ability to be charitable and to grow in virtue. Almost by necessity, we find success in putting away bad habits and rising to grow in new, better habits.

Facebook Page For several weeks, I have been producing videos of Masses and prayers which are livestreamed over Facebook. However, last week I changed the venue from my personal Facebook page to our newly-created Facebook page for our parishes. Search in your Facebook search box for "St. Mary's, Aurora and St. Joseph's, Giltner" to find, like, and follow happenings in our parishes. I know that not all of you have Facebook, either

because you are not able/willing to delve into the technology or because you have strong opinions against putting yourself into this platform of social media. I respect your position if you are in either of these categories. For those who are friendly to Facebook, this medium is providing great opportunities for us to stay together as communities of faith. *** As to the new Facebook page itself, there are one or two other pages which our parish began, but abandoned, years ago. It seemed wise to start over from scratch and to make it a priority to keep the new page "fresh" with content. The new page is still in its growing stages; some of you may have questions or ideas as to how the page could develop. Please let us know in the parish office.

Cobalt As mentioned in previous communications, the Facebook videos of Mass that I record are being uploaded, for free, to be viewed, for free, on Cobalt TV through Hamilton Telecommunications. I apparently could have/should have been utilizing this resource before now. On your remote control, you hit the "On Demand" button, which will prompt you to choose "Church Services". There you will find a separate tab to choose for St. Mary's or St. Joseph's.

Group E-mails I have sent out several e-mails to all parishioners who have a valid address submitted to our database, which amount to about 200 of you. One that I sent recently had complicated attachments...and almost everyone's e-mail bounced back my sent e-mail. This was kind of embarrassing but served as a learning experience. What I would like to do is utilize a service such as Mail Chimp or Constant Contact which polishes group e-mails to improve readability and engagement. Perhaps some of you are familiar with these e-mail services?

Litany of Trust In the on-line version of this week's bulletin, I am publishing the Litany of Trust. I think it's beautiful. You may find it helpful.

Signs of Hope The Diocese of Lincoln recently announced with great joy the Ordination of six new priests and two new deacons! These men represent such hope for our local church across southern Nebraska. They are scheduled to be ordained, God willing, on May 22nd and 23rd (Memorial Day weekend).

Sources of Hope Catholic Social Services is offering telehealth counselling; go to immaculateheartcounseling.org. It is not weakness to need to address your mental health; mental health is true health as much as your physical health. It is helpful to pray the Liturgy of the Hours; download the free iBreviary app. Go to our parishes' Facebook page for daily Masses and prayers. Consider tuning in to Spirit Catholic Radio by app, or over the air at 91.5 FM. Pray the Rosary, all together as a family. Pray with someone over the phone. Read the Bible and be good to your family. Really listen, with intention, to each other.

God Bless You!!!

Father Grell