

PALM SUNDAY - 2020

Dear Friends in Christ, as we observe this year's Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak, I am sure that, like me, you are experiencing a tremendous sense of loss since we cannot gather together in our church. Our Triduum liturgies are for me the highlight of the year and I would never have imagined a year like this would come.

It's hard to put into words this what is in my heart. I came across an article by Dr. Timothy P. O'Malley which appeared in the April 5-11 edition of the Our Sunday Visitor newspaper (Vol.108, No. 50). I want to share with you some of what I read. He writes:

"In a typical year, Palm Sunday is the porch of Holy Week. We join the crowds in crying out in praise, awaiting the coming of the King of Glory."

"We listen to the prophecy of the Suffering Servant, who heals the wounds of the world through an unimaginable obedience ..."

"We contemplate St. Paul's hymn of praise to the God who did not seek to hold on to power but emptied himself, to the point of death ..."

"We praise our King and our Glory through the proclamation of his glorious Passion, the drama that describes why we gather in our churches [in the first place]."

"... All of this will still happen. Most of us won't be there."

Dr. O'Malley goes on to reflect on the other celebrations of Holy Week, and then invites us to recognize collectively that *"our not being there hurts."*

Yes, we can watch the liturgies on TV or as they are live-streamed (as we will attempt to do here at OLC on our Facebook page and hopefully YouTube). We are certainly encouraged to pray the Stations of the Cross and the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. The Diocese of Gary is providing resources for praying on these special days at home (see our website www.olcweb.org).

But we won't be together as a parish family, and this is a great sacrifice we are being called to make. Dr. O'Malley explains why:

"We won't be there because our neighbor is suffering, because there is an illness that threatens the very common good. We won't be there because that ashes put on our foreheads - what seems like a lifetime ago - was not an empty sign. We are dust. We are ash. We are."

My dear brothers and sisters, those ashes - made by burning last year's palms - are not the end of the story. Although our liturgical celebration together of Easter will not take place, our Easter faith is still alive in our minds and in our hearts. In fact, we need to hold on to that faith more than ever.

Jesus, by his Death and Resurrection, has conquered sin, and death, and Covid-19.

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Every act of sacrifice and every expression of selfless love embraces the Cross and releases the power flowing from Christ's Resurrection.

I want to conclude by sharing some of Pope Francis's beautiful reflection on the Gospel of the Storm on the Sea (Mk 4:35-41) which he gave on March 27th during the extraordinary "Urbi et Orbi" blessing from St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. Any tragedy, any trial or tribulation, can test our faith. In the midst of every storm in life, Jesus says, "Do not be afraid."

From Pope Francis:

"Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God, life never dies."

"The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support, and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith."

"We have an anchor: by his cross, we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross, we have been redeemed. We have hope: by his cross, we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love."

*"In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: **He is risen and is living by our side!**"*

My dear family of faith, I will be holding all of you very close to my heart as I celebrate the liturgies of this Holy Week. Again, check our Facebook page and YouTube channel to watch any videos we are able to post and information we can provide.

God bless you!

Fr. Peter