‘With God, life never dies’

Pope Francis issues historic address during ‘extraordinary moment of prayer’

Following is the text of the meditation Pope Francis offered in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican during a March 27 prayer service on the meaning of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for humanity. At the conclusion of the prayer, Pope Francis gave an extraordinary blessing “urbi et orbi” (“to the city and the world”).

“When evening had come” (Mk 4:35). The Gospel passage we have just heard begins like this. For weeks now, it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people’s gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel, we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and precious, all of us called to row together, needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat ... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying “We are perishing” (Mk 4:38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

It is easy to recognize ourselves in this story. What is harder to understand is Jesus’ attitude. While his disciples are quite naturally alarmed and desperate, he stands in the stern, in the part of the boat that sinks first. And what does he do? In spite of the tempest, he sleeps on soundly, trusting in the Father; this is the only time in the Gospels we see Jesus sleeping. When he wakes up, after calming the wind and the waters, he turns to the disciples in a reproaching voice: “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” (Mk 4:40).

Let us try to understand. In what does the lack of the disciples’ faith consist, as contrasted with Jesus’ trust? They had not stopped believing in him; in fact, they called on him. But we see how they call on him: “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” (Mk 4:38). Do you not care how they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: “Do you not care about me?” It is a phrase that wounds and lures us away, uncovering once more that false and superfluous certainty around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people’s souls; all those attempts to anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly “save” us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.

In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.

“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Lord, your words this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: “Wake up, Lord!”

“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you.
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ! If there is any truth in the saying, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” our fondness for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and one another should be growing leaps and bounds. Circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic seem to change by the hour. Since my last message to you, our governor, like those in other states, has issued a “stay-at-home” order at least through April 6.

Queridos hermanos y hermanas en Cristo:

Reciban un cordial saludo en nombre de nuestro Señor Jesucristo. Si el conocido dicho de que “la ausencia aviva el carroño” encierra algo de verdad, nuestro cariño por los sacramentos, especialmente por la eucaristía, y por nuestros compañeros se aminorará enormemente. La situación sobre la pandemia del virus COVID-19 parecería cambiar minuto a minuto. Desde nuestro mensaje anterior para ustedes, nuestro gobernador, al igual que los de otros estados, ha emitido la orden de “quedarse en casa” por lo menos hasta el 6 de abril. Especialmente a la luz de que han continuado aumentando drásticamente los casos confirmados en todo el estado de Indiana, continúa en vigor la suspensión de misas públicas, así como también todas las restricciones litúrgicas, sacramentales y pastoral. Debemos comprender que la finalidad de esta medida no es tanto para proteger a nuestros sacerdotes, aunque ciertamente necesitamos que estén sanos para poder servir a los fieles, sino para proteger vidas especialmente la de los más pequeños, y tiempo, mantener el enfoque principal en la salvación de las almas. En el caso de esta pandemia, tal como fue en el caso de la primera, hay que preservar todo lo que hagamos de manera heroica y ser vectores de contagio del virus resulta muy difuso. Los efectos que ha producido la pandemia en tan solo un par de semanas ya han perjudicado considerablemente a muchas de nuestras familias y comunidades en lo económico, emocional, mental y espiritual. Debemos permanecer fundamentalmente atentos a los pobres, los vulnerables y los ancianos, y preocuparnos por ellos. Incluso a pesar del “distanciamiento social” y de la orden de “quedarse en casa,” la Arquidiócesis y las parroquianas continúan prestando servicios a los más necesitados, primordialmente en cuanto a alimentos y tejido. Cada uno de nosotros puede hacer su parte, incluso a la distancia, y comunicarnos con parientes, amigos y vecinos. Estemos particularmente pendientes de aquellos que quizá se sientan abrumados por la ansiedad, la soledad, el temor y la soledad. Donde algunos ven un desafío, otros tal vez vean una oportunidad. Por supuesto que esta es una época de dificultades, pero para las personas de fe, esta también puede ser una época de oportunidades. Algunos me han contado que están aprovechando esta situación para hacer la limpieza de primavera, para revisar cajas llenas de recuerdos y mirar fotos viejas. Quizá esta sea una ocasión para profundizar en nuestra vida de oración, para hacer un examen de conciencia, para la lectura espiritual, para reflexionar sobre las Escrituras, estudiar para comprender mejor las enseñanzas católicas y para agradecer nuestras bendiciones, tanto individualmente como en familia. No nos desesperemos en estos días, que podemos ser tan difíciles. Apúntate con la oración y no olvides que somos hijos amados de Dios que hemos sido declarados por Jesucristo coherederos del reino eterno de Dios. En estos últimos días de la Cuaresma, recordemos que seguimos llevando la cruz de Jesús en esta vida para poder compartir su victoria y su gloria en la vida eterna. En cada uno de nuestros hogares, mantengámonos centrados. Con la certeza de mis oraciones continuas y mis mejores deseos de vida en Cristo, Sinceramente your,

Ramón

Mantengámonos centrados en Cristo durante este período tan difícil

Due to the COVID-19 crisis which has prevented the faithful from participating at the Holy Week liturgies in their parishes, sample prayer services have been adapted from various texts and rituals of Holy Week to allow families to celebrate with the Church these sacred days of the year. The resources, made available by the Diocese of Gary, Ind., can be downloaded and printed as a PDF file on our website by entering this address: www.archindy.org/HolyWeekAtHome.

OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Effective Immediately

Deacon David Reising, in ministry at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Bedford and St. Mary Parish in Mitchell, appointed pro tem Parish Life Coordinator of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Bedford and St. Mary Parish in Mitchell.

Very Rev. Eric M. Johnson, V.E., episcopal vicar for Clergy, Religious and Parish Life coordinators and sacramental minister for St. Agnes Parish in Nashville, appointed Priest Moderator pro tem at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Bedford and St. Mary Parish in Mitchell, while continuing as pastoral vicar for Clergy, Religious and Parish Life coordinators and sacramental minister for St. Agnes Parish in Nashville.

Correction

Sue Weber, assistant facilitator of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan process and committee, was omitted from the list published in the March 27 issue. †

Pope Francis’ prayer intentions for April

• Freedom from Addiction—We pray that those suffering from addiction may be helped and accompanied.

(To see Pope Francis’ monthly intentions, go to www.archindy.org/popesintentions.)

Holy Week 2020 resources for prayer at home

The effects of this pandemic in just a couple of weeks are already having a profound impact on our lives. Since my last message to you, our governor, like those in other states, has issued a “stay-at-home” order at least through April 6.

Specialized in pastoral counseling, she provides support to those suffering from addiction and their families. She is available for prayer requests and meditation sessions. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact her at Eileen.McLaughlin@archindy.org or 317-236-1570.
In wake of coronavirus epidemic, Holy Week liturgies and Easter Sunday Mass to be livestreamed online

By Sean Gallagher

The liturgies of Holy Week—including Masses of Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday, the commemoration of Christ’s passion on Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil—as well as Easter Sunday, are the high point of the Church’s liturgical year. But Catholics across central and southern Indiana will not be able to gather to worship together in these liturgies because of the pandemic of the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

Decisions made by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson regarding public celebration of Holy Week liturgies and the celebration of the sacrament of penance were posted on the archdiocesan website (www.archindy.org) on March 25 Out of concern for the health of archdiocesan Catholics because of the pandemic, public celebration of Holy Week liturgies have been suspended. This follows the March 17 decision of the bishops of Indiana to suspend public celebration of the Mass until further notice.

The most recent decision was made by Archbishop Thompson, who said it was difficult for him knowing that the public celebration of Holy Week liturgies would not take place.

“I think it will be most intense when we begin the prayer without our brothers and sisters in faith, at least physically present,” Father Beidelman said. “Knowing that we’ll be livestreaming those liturgies and that people will be connected to us in real time I think will help alleviate some of the intensity of how it will feel without them.”

Videos of daily and Sunday Masses celebrated by the archbishop and archdiocesan priests are available at www.archindy.org. That is also where Catholics of central and southern Indiana can go to view livestreamed Holy Week liturgies, as well as for those for Easter Sunday and Easter Monday.

Father Beidelman has heard from many archdiocesan Catholics about how grateful they are for the availability of such videos.

“It’s a reminder to me that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of our unity with God and with one another,” he said, “and that that communion can be expressed although we’re not physically in one another’s presence and not receiving the Eucharist together.”

Father Beidelman said that resources are available through the “Eucharist,” page 11, and the “Liturgy,” page 11, of the archdiocesan website.

Pope Francis grants plenary indulgences tied to pandemic

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis has granted plenary indulgences to those suffering from COVID-19, their caregivers, friends and family and those who help them with their prayers.

But what is this ancient practice of offering indulgences through prayer and penance and what is needed to receive them?

An indulgence is not a quick ticket to heaven, as St. John Paul II once said. Rather, it is an aid for the real conversion that leads to eternal happiness.

Sins are forgiven through the sacrament of penance, but then there is a kind of punishment still due the sinner, which the saint, she asks him to mitigate or cancel the painful aspect of punishment by fostering its medicinal aspect through other actions of grace,” the late pope said.

An indulgence, then, is the result of the abundance of God’s mercy, which he offers to humanity through Jesus Christ and through the Church, he said.

But this gift cannot be received automatically or simply by fulfilling a few exterior requirements nor can it be approached with a superficial attitude, St. John Paul said.

The reception of an indulgence depends on “our turning away from sin and our connected to us in real time I think will help alleviate some of the intensity of how it will feel without them.”

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Celebrating Holy Week and Easter sine populo

“Since the Solemnity of Easter cannot be transferred, in the countries which have been struck by the [coronavirus] disease and where restrictions around the assembly and movement of people have been imposed, bishops and priests may celebrate the rites of Holy Week without the presence of the people and in a suitable place, avoiding concelebration and omitting the sign of peace” (Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, March 25, 2020).

For the first time in the Church’s 2,000-year history, the sacred rites of holy week and Easter will be celebrated sine populo, without the presence of people. The liturgies will take place as scheduled, but the bishops and priests who celebrate them will be virtually alone—in most places without concelebrants, altar servers or congregations.

“This is unprecedented and unimaginable. The very meaning of “Church” (eklesia) in Greek is “gathering” or “assembly.” Gathering to celebrate Mass on Sundays and holy days is central to the life of a community of Catholic worshipers. We worship God in communities of faith, and the sustenance we receive in these sacred assemblies (especially our reception of Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist) is what enables us to carry out the Church’s mission “in the world.”

Private Masses, comprising a priest alone or with just a few participants, were prevalent before the Second Vatican Council’s liturgical reforms. Many churches had “side altars” where these individual Masses were celebrated. But these private celebrations never took the place of the community Mass where the people gathered for daily, Sunday and holy day Masses. What is happening now as a result of the coronavirus and the necessity of social distancing is completely new and unprecedented in our Church’s experience.

Thank God we have instruments of communication that can make these sacred liturgies and other prayers and devotions available—on television and radio as well as livestreaming to our computers and other devices. Through the modern miracle of social media, Pope Francis and our bishops and priests can come into our homes, helping us remain connected (remotely) to the Church’s prayer and worship.

Some object that electronic liturgies are a poor substitute for being physically present. And, of course, it’s not possible to receive the body and blood of Christ unless you are actually there to partake in this great sacrament. Most livestreamed or televised Masses suggest that viewers make a spiritual communication at the time when the Eucharist would normally be distributed but, of course, it’s not the same. Especially when we have recently been made aware of the need to help Catholics better understand the Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, it’s awkward at best to have to replace actual reception of the sacrament with a sincere expression of desire.

Still, if you have had the opportunity to attend Mass virtually with your pastor, or with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson or one of the priests at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis, or to pray with Pope Francis livestreamed from an empty St. Peter’s Square in Rome, you probably have experienced a very special connection with our Lord. Without the benefit of electronic media, we would be completely isolated from the celebration of the Eucharist. These opportunities help us remain close to Jesus in spite of social distancing.

In recent televised Mass, Father Patrick Beidelman, rector of SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, reminded his remote congregation that: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves” (Ps 34:18).

“These days, we have all witnessed heartbreaking stories of people who have lost someone to this awful disease or whose lives have been ‘crushed in spirit’ by losing jobs or by being cut off from family and friends,” Father Beidelman said. “Today, it is more important than ever that we stay close to Jesus and, through him, to one another.”

The great writer G.K. Chesterton once said, contrary to the popular expression, that “Anything worth doing is worth doing badly.” Chesterton’s point was that the really important things in life are worth doing, even if we can’t do them perfectly. Attending Mass and other prayer services remotely is definitely not the same as actually being there, but it’s a lot better than nothing.

This Holy Week and Easter we have a choice: 1) Be isolated from society or 2) Be isolated from society and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints in possible participants would be informed, relevant, well-expressed and temperate in tone. They must reflect a basic sense of courtesy and respect.

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary based on space limitations, pastoral sensitivity and content, as well as the need for spelling and grammar. In order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed. Letters may be signed, but, for serious reasons, names may be withheld.

Send letters to “Letters to the Editor,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org.

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—Daniel Conway

Reflection/John Shaughnessy

Go the extra mile to walking together forever

Only moments remained before the players left the locker room for the game that would decide the championship. The players were dressed in pieces of white chalk, the head coach scrawled on the blackboard, “Win today, and we walk together forever.” Hours later, the players stormed into that locker room again, smiling, hugging, dancing—knowing they had achieved a moment in time that would bind them all for life.

Yet to “walk together forever” is not just reserved for championship teams or the world of sports. All meaningful friendships have the quality of “walking together forever.” Such friendships frequently begin in the challenging times and transitions of life. In our youth, the uncertainty, fear and intensity of a new beginning in high school and college often lead to bonds that last a lifetime. These friends welcome and support us when we desperately need someone to be there for us. And even if the years, miles and changes weaken that connection to some degree, there’s still a sense of shared history for that person, still a sense that in the mind and the heart we “walk together forever.” It’s the same way with friendships later in life when people reach out to support and uplift us. People are reaching out more and more to “be there” for friends, and to be a friend to people who may have never met. My wife and I have increased our efforts to connect with friends, and they with us. Our children share virtual “happy hours” with friends and virtual “holy hours” with strangers. Our younger neighbors stress that they will be there for us whenever we need them.

Our parish offers an outlet for parishioners to keep in touch by phone or e-mail. Our neighborhood association puts a flyer in our mailbox that carries this message, “Reach out if you need AVH help.” The list goes on and on. At a time in our lives when 6 feet is the measuring distance of separation, people are going the extra mile to show we are all in this together.

Christ gave us the ultimate example of going the extra mile, of “walking together forever,” on his path to Calvary. That walk changed everything for us in our relationship with God, fulfilling God’s promise of salvation. It’s a walk that was also strikingly marked by the fact that Christ didn’t make it alone. The night before, none of his friends stood by him, two even betrayed him. Yet as he carried his cross to Calvary, some of the people he loved—and who loved him—were there for him. And a stranger helped him carry his cross.

That sharing of the cross adds another defining dimension to the connection between God and man—the two walking together forever—that will change the world forever. In the same way today, God is there to help us carry our cross.

As we prepare to enter Holy Week, go the extra mile in your relationships with God and others, knowing that when you do, you will walk together forever.

(John Shaughnessy is the assistant editor of The Criterion. This reflection has been adapted from book, Then Something Wonderful Happened: Unlikely Encounters and Unexpected graces in search of a friendship with God.)

Letters Policy

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—Daniel Conway

Shalom: A message for our Jewish brothers and sisters for the days of Pesach

My dear brothers and sisters of the Jewish faith:

As you, your families and friends gather for the days of Pesach, I extend to you the hope of God’s protection and deliverance. The God of the Covenant holds firm to his promises. He has been true to many previous promises. We rejoice with you in His heeded, and firmly offer our prayers for you.

This great promise is fulfilled in gathering his people before God at Sinai, and as your ancestors in faith have gathered for millennia to thank God for His saving actions, so your Christian brothers and sisters delight to hear of your coming together for prayer, fasting, and celebrating God’s goodness to His chosen people.

Our world faces many challenges today. It is ours to join you in facing those challenges, finding solutions rooted in God’s goodness and faithfulness. As once He led your ancestors forth from bondage, from wretched slavery to promised land, let us invoke together His name that we might reveal God’s goodness and faithfulness for our own lives and for the good of the world.

Shalom! At the end of your feasting, may the joy of “Next year in Jerusalem” ring in your homes and in your hearts.

+ John C. Thompson

Archbishop of Indianapolis

Most Reverend Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

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La tragedia y el triunfo de Jesús nos llevan a la salvación

Jesús’ triumph and tragedy leads to our redemption

“The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” (Mt 21:9).

This Sunday, we celebrate an unusual day in the liturgical calendar. It’s a day of both triumph and tragedy, a day that demonstrates most clearly the fickleness of human behavior, especially when people gather in crowds.

On Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion, we recall Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem heralded by shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Hosanna in the highest!” But we use this ostensibly happy day to reflect on this same Lord’s cruel and undeserving passion and death on a cross. Once again, the Catholic “both/and” is used to reveal the truth about both sinful human nature and the extreme lengths that God will travel to redeem us and forgive our sins.

In the second reading for this Sunday (Phil 2:6-11), St. Paul proclaims the extraordinary selflessness of God: “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8).

What we celebrate on Palm Sunday is very far from “the lifestyles of the rich and famous.” Jesus may have been greeted as a superstar by the crowd, but his true greatness lies in his humility. All the power and majesty of God will be set aside in just a few days as he “empties himself” and takes on the lowliness of our human nature. All the joy and adulation of the crowd will quickly dissipate and become the ugly, rancorous cry: “Let him be crucified!”

This Sunday’s remembrance of both the triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the tragic passion and death of the most innocent man who ever lived is important for us today. We live in a time when extremes of love and hate, infatuation and disillusionment dominate our society and our Church. Social media reflect these extremes on an hourly basis. Pope Francis points out how we are drawn into this and hope on his Twitter account, and thousands of people reply with messages that range from gratitude to venomous attacks and everything in between. As with Jesus, many greet the Holy Father with shouts of Hosanna, while others spit on him and say horrible things about him.

Fortunately, St. Paul reminds us that suffering and hardship are redemptive. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus whose self-sacrificing love has overcome sin and transformed our world from darkness to light. “Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the Earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11).

The hosannas we sing this weekend—especially as we meditate on our Lord’s suffering and death—should express our genuine yoy and gratitude for the presence of our Redeemer among us today, and every day, in the sacrificial banquet we celebrate with him during each Mass. Yes, there is ugliness and pain all around us. Even Jesus gave voice to his suffering and sense of abandonment when he cried out from the cross: “El, Eli, lema sabachthani?” Matthew tells us means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46)

The tragedy of Jesus’ passion and death became his triumphant resurrection, his complete and total victory over the power of sin and death. Evil still exists, but it cannot—and will not—win in the end.

The first reading for Palm Sunday (Is 50:6-7) anticipates the final thoughts of Jesus: “I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffs and spitting.”

The Lord Goes is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.” (Is 50:6-7).

As we conclude this Lenten season and prepare for the Paschal Triduum, let’s ask our Lord to help us stand firm when we are faced with life’s tragedies (large and small). May we always maintain our confidence in the triumphant love of God.

“Y las multitudes que iban delante de él y las que iban detrás gritaban: ‘Hosanna al Hijo de David! Bendito Aquel que viene en nombre del Señor!’” (Mt 21:9).

Este domingo celebramos algo insusual en el calendario litúrgico: se trata de un día de triunfo y tragedia, una jornada que demuestra con gran claridad la volatilidad de la conducta humana, especialmente cuando las personas se congregan en multitudes.

El Domingo de Ramos de la Pasión del Señor, recordamos la entrada triunfal de Jesús en Jerusalén anunciada por los cánticos de “¡Hosanna Hijo de David!” “Hosanna in the highest!” pero aprovechamos este día de manera particular para reflexionar sobre la crueldad e inmerecida presión del Señor y su muerte en una cruz. Una vez más, se aplica el concepto de los “católicos del todo y el contrario” para revelar la verdad tanto acerca de la condición pecadora del ser humano como de que Dios hace lo incomprensible para redimir y perdonar nuestros pecados.

En la segunda lectura de este domingo (Fil 2:6-11), San Pablo proclama la extraordinaria entrega de Jesucristo: “Crucifiquéme” “¡Cristo Jesús aunque existía en forma de Dios, no consideró ser igual a Dios como algo a qué aferrarse, sino que se despojó a sí mismo tomándose forma humana, haciéndose semejante a los hombres. Y hallándose en forma de hombre, se humilló El mismo, haciéndose obediente hasta la muerte, y muerte de cruz” (Fil 2:6-8).

Lo que celebramos el Domingo de Ramos dista mucho del “estilo de vida de los ricos y famosos.” Aunque las multitudes hayan recibido a Jesús como una superestrella, su verdadera grandeza se encuentra en su humildad. Todo el poder y la majestad de Dios quedará a un lado dentro de unos pocos días en el momento en que se “despojó a sí mismo” y adoptó la forma de un humilde servidor.

El recuerdo que nos presenta este domingo de la entrada triunfal de Jesús en Jerusalén y la trágica pasión y muerte del hombre más inocente que haya existido resulta importante para todos hoy en día. Vivimos en una época en la que los extremos del amor y el odio, el encantamiento y la desilusión dominan a nuestra alrededor, incluso la Iglesia. A toda hora vemos reflejados estos extremos en las redes sociales. El papa Francisco publica palabras de reto y esperanza en su cuenta de Twitter y miles de personas responden con mensajes que significan “Dios mío, Dios mío, ¿por qué me has abandonado?” (Mt 27:46).

Jesús estaba sobrecogido por el dolor; sentía que iba a claudicar, pero no lo hizo. En vez de ello, perdonó nuestros pecados y encomendó su espíritu al Padre. Afortunadamente, san Pablo nos recuerda que el sufrimiento y las vicisitudes nos redime. Seguimos los pasos de Jesús cuyo amor abnegado ha superado el pecado y ha transformado nuestro mundo de oscuridad en luz.

Por eso lo cual Dios también exaltó hasta lo sumo, y fe confirme el nombre que es sobre todo nombre, para que al nombre de Jesús se doble toda redención de los que están en el cielo, y en la tierra, y debajo de la tierra, y toda lengua confiese que Jesucristo es Señor, para gloria de Dios Padre” (Fil 2:9-11).

Los Domínicos que entonamos este fin de semana, aun cuando meditemos acerca del sufrimiento y la muerte de nuestro Señor, deben expresar nuestra genuina alegría y agradecimiento por la presencia de nuestro Redentor entre nosotros hoy en día, todos los días, en el banquete sacrificial que celebramos con Él en cada misa. Seguimos los pasos de Jesús, crucificado en un día que gritó desde la cruz: “El, Eli, lema sabachthani?” que San Mateo nos dice que significa “Dios mío, Dios mío, ¿por qué me has abandonado?” (Mt 27:46).

Jesús, nuestro Redentor, nos muestra a nuestra sociedad y a la Iglesia. A toda hora el mundo avanza hacia el camino del pecado, sufriente y muerto. El mundo sigue existiendo hasta que finalmente no podrá vencerlo y no lo hará.

La primera lectura del Domingo de Ramos (Is 50:4-7) anticipa los últimos pensamientos de Jesús: “Oferete Mi espalda a los que me herian. Y Mis mejillas a los que me arrancaban la barba. No escondí Mi rostro de injurias y salvajos. El Señor Dios me ayudó. Por eso no soy humillado, Por eso he puesto Mi rostro como pedernal. Y el que no seré avergonzado” (Is 50:4-7).

A medida que concluimos la temporada de la Cuaresma y nos preparamos para el triduo pasional, preparamos a nuestro Señor y a nosotros a mantenernos firmes al enfrentar las tragedias de la vida (grandes y pequeñas). Que siempre mantengamos nuestra confianza en el amor triunfante de Dios. Amen.
Priests offer a unifying message: ‘It is in times like these that our faith really shines forth’

By John Shaughnessy

When Father Todd Riebe entered his parish chapel that late March morning, he had an “almost vertiginous” feeling as he prepared to celebrate Sunday Mass without any of his parishioners physically present there.

Then he looked at the photos of all the smiling parish families that Deacon Michael Frolik had pinned to the chairs of the pews. And the pastor of Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis smiled as he felt again the special bond that connects pastors in the archdiocese with their parishioners.

“I began to feel a spiritual connection with all the people of the parish precisely during the celebration of so-called ‘private’ Masses,” Father Riebe recalled. “Then another surprising feeling overwhelmed him during this time when all public Masses and services in the archdiocese—including liturgies during Holy Week and on Easter—have been suspended indefinitely because of the coronavirus crisis.

Even when the restrictions imposed on us by the virus are over, I will be more aware than ever of the presence of people at Mass who are not physically with us,” he said. “I think of people in nursing homes or hospitals who would love to be with us, people in jails or prisons who cannot be with us, and people who don’t feel welcome or who have been hurt by the Church or who are still finding their way.

“The Mass—and the love behind the sacrifice that takes place at every Mass—embraces the entire world. It’s ironic that I would come to experience the presence of so many people in an empty church.”

Father Riebe is one of three archdiocesan priests that The Criterion contacted to share their thoughts on how this uncertain and unprecedented time has impacted their lives and their connection to their parishioners. Yet something greater has come from the coronavirus crisis.

Something greater has come from the coronavirus crisis. How we long to hear God’s word is always heard in a particular context,” Father Riebe noted. “The context of Lent 2020 is, undoubtedly, the coronavirus. How could the words of John’s Gospel from the Fifth Sunday of Lent not jump off the page at us in the context of the coronavirus? ‘Lazarus come forth!’ (Jn 11:43). How we long to hear those words addressed to us.

“In the overall context of Lent, the coronavirus has offered us the opportunity to sacrifice so many of the good things we enjoy, such as freedom of movement and association with friends, for a greater good—the protection of others, especially the most vulnerable. It’s exactly what Jesus did for us on the cross.”

Embracing the opportunity to sacrifice

“In the overall context of Lent, the coronavirus has offered us the opportunity to sacrifice so many of the good things we enjoy, such as freedom of movement and association with friends, for a greater good—the protection of others, especially the most vulnerable. It’s exactly what Jesus did for us on the cross.”

Standing spiritually connected

In this time when public Masses have been suspended, it’s important to make an act of spiritual communion, noted Father Hollowell, administrator of St. Paul Parish in Tell City and St. Mark Parish in Perry County.

“In fact, it has been practiced by many Catholics who, over the centuries, were not able to receive holy Communion,” he noted. “One of my favorite examples is Father Walter Ciszek, who spent six years in a Soviet prison without bread or wine to say Mass. During this time, he made several acts of spiritual communion each day by praying the rosary. He found great consolation in these daily rosaries.”

Father Hollowell encouraged people to make praying the rosary a part of their spiritual communion. He noted that there is “no more frequent prayer found on the lips of the saints.”

Sharing the hope during Holy Week

Father Chris Wadelton already knows the main theme he will share in his online homilies for Holy Week.

“It is in times like these that our faith really shines forth,” said the pastor of St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus. “Because of our belief in Jesus Christ as our savior, we take the opportunity to find a new path of faith to be there for others.

“When people ask me what I love most about being a priest, ‘people’ is always at the top of that list,” he said. “We priests are blessed beyond measure as people open their lives to us in the happiest of moments of their lives and in the most difficult of moments of their lives. Our days are literally filled with people.

“While the pandemic has necessarily closed some doors to us, it has opened others. A good part of my day is now spent on the telephone, and sending and responding to text messages and e-mails. By the middle of every day, I am recharging my cell phone. Where there is a will, there is a way.

“In these days, only caller ID can protect parishioners from their pastors!”

Online Masses help priests continue to connect people to God

By John Shaughnessy

Father Chris Wadelton offered an interesting personal perspective as the archdiocese and many parishes across central and southern Indiana provide online Masses in response to the coronavirus crisis.

First, he acknowledged the challenge of not being able to celebrate Mass with his parishioners in the pew.

“I don’t think I realized how much physical contact and feeding the people from the pews—that people from the online Masses—five in English each week, three in Spanish—that he has celebrated since March 18, the day when all public Masses in the archdiocese were ended until further notice.

“The music director even provided some basic music, and people commented that it was a comfort to watch Mass on TV the church and hear the familiar music,” said Father Wadelton, pastor of St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus. “We have also expanded our Prayers of the Faithful to include more personal intentions, which also helps me and others to feel connected.”

Father Todd Riebe has been pleasantly surprised that many people have taken advantage of online Mass opportunities during this time.

“It points to a hunger in people for spirituality and a desire for that connectedness with God and with one another that parish life offers us,” said Father Riebe, pastor of Christ the King Parish and administrator of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, both in Indianapolis.

“It doesn’t matter that the quality of our online services will most probably not win any Oscars for technical achievement. What matters is that it brings us home to our parish. And we all know, ‘There’s no place like home!’ I think an increased use of technology at the parish level will be one of the blessings that will emerge from the present situation.”

Father Tony Hollowell shares an online Sunday Mass as the administrator of St. Paul Parish in Tell City and St. Mark Parish in Perry County. He said he misses the personal connection of celebrating Mass together with his parishioners in church.

“It is a real loss, but even in the midst of that loss, the Mass is very beautiful, because Christ remains truly present,” he said. “When I added, ‘I have heard from others that it does give them a sense of being connected, which in turn gives me a sense of being connected.’

While the coronavirus crisis has led to changing approaches in the Church, these priests say the heart of their lives are still focused on two goals: keeping their connection with their parishioners and keeping them connected to God.

“As a parish, we are trying our best to remain connected with as many people as possible, even if it is just a quick phone call, to let them know they are in our thoughts and prayers,” Father Wadelton said. “This has been nice.”

Father Riebe views this time as an opportunity to find a new path of faith to be there for others.

“When people ask me what I love most about being a priest, ‘people’ is always at the top of that list,” he said. “We priests are blessed beyond measure as people open their lives to us in the happiest of moments of their lives and in the most difficult of moments of their lives. Our days are literally filled with people.

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“In these days, only caller ID can protect parishioners from their pastors!”

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Christ’s passion calls believers to love and be loved until the moment of their death

By Elise Italiano Ureneck

Years ago when I taught high school theology, I was tasked with developing a curriculum for senior students focused on bioethics and the Church’s moral tradition. The course explored issues informed by philosophy, biology, technology and theology.

It was challenging to teach since it dealt with controversial and divisive issues, from contraception to abortion, in vitro fertilization and organ donation.

At year’s end, we covered end-of-life issues, physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. It wasn’t a happy way to end the course, but it was necessary. After all, the Church is concerned with the whole span of a person’s life—from conception to natural death—as well individual and communal rights and responsibilities.

When introducing a new topic, I’d take a poll to gauge where students fall on an issue, to shape my approach and measure moral development. I found that teenagers’ initial judgments tracked closely to popular opinion, since teens (as a demographic) favor unrestricted autonomy and are highly skeptical of authority.

I noticed two trends in polling on end-of-life issues: 1) they argued that researchers should pursue the development of cures by any means; and 2) when facing an incurable illness, a person should have the right to take his or her life, the model of compassionate or merciful thing to do.

I set aside polemical arguments in exchange for a viewing of Of Gods and Men, a film that chronicles the story of the Trappist monks at Thibirine, who faced the loss of a French monk during a lesson on assisted suicide.

I told them that I wanted to explore the question, “If you knew you were going to die, what would it mean to die with dignity?” From another perspective.

While execution is not the same as illness, I was hoping it would benefit them to witness the monks’ deliberate decision, both individually and communally, to remain in the community they served, to love them and be loved by them until the brutal end that they foresaw and expected.

The exercise worked for many students. A majority of them came to conclude that in our culture, one in which autonomy is sacred and natural communities have broken down, to suffer until the end makes little sense.

But for Christians, dying with dignity means using every last bit of time that we are given, no matter our quality of life or the kind of death that we will meet, to love and to allow others to love us. “Compassion” is rooted in a Latin word that means “to suffer with.” Death is not meant to be a solitary act.

It’s the lesson that the Lord leaves us with in this season of Lent, most visibly beginning on Palm Sunday and ending on Calvary.

Jesus enters Jerusalem, fully aware of what is to befall him. And yet, as St. Paul writes, he was “obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Crucifixion was both painful and humiliating. Jesus, who “was in the form of God,” but who came “in human likeness” shows that God enters fully into our mortality, including the very worst of it (Phil 2:6-7).

To those arguing for a person’s right to take his or her life, the model of being “obedient to death” would seem like the ultimate loss of freedom.

But the word “obey” is rooted in a Latin word that means “to listen.” Death is a teacher, with its own wisdom to impart. That wisdom, for the Christian, consists of paying attention to the Lord’s final earthly lesson: That while there is still life, there is still time to love.

(Elise Italiano Ureneck, associate director of the Center for the Church in the 21st Century at Boston College, is a columnist for Catholic News Service.)

A re-enactment of the crucifixion of Jesus is seen in Bensheim, Germany. As St. Paul writes, Jesus was “obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). (CNS photo/Kai Pfaffenbach, Reuters)

A woman carries a large wooden cross during a Palm Sunday procession in Dili, East Timor. Christ’s free embrace of his suffering and death calls believers to love and be loved until the moment of their deaths. (CNS photo/Lirio Da Fonseca, Reuters)

As Christians, we must follow Jesus’ example of love

Easter Sunday comes with Jesus Christ’s resurrection. It is also a time to resuscitate our souls and remember our forgotten brothers and sisters.

In the New Testament, Jesus brings us good news. Though we may have spent time doing good, loving, caring and serving, we are still often accused of not loving the poor and afflicted. People came to him from everywhere (Mt 14:25), but who were those people? They were separated from the main groups. The poor and isolated found in Jesus, someone who loved and defended them. They saw someone that spoke with authority and conviction. Jesus was not afraid to take a hard line to give defense of the one that is being left out.

Jesus shows us the way: what is it that the call as Christians that we should follow? It certainly is the loving and caring of people. But sometimes it is hard to take this lesson of the one that is being left out.

Many saints teach us how to love. St. Teresa of Calcutta taught us the way to love the forgotten ones, and St. Oscar Romero is an example of defending the poor and the oppressed. He died celebrating holy Mass. His life was marked by the defense of the poor and those afflicted by injustice and tyranny.

It seems that nowadays, there is indifference—an inexcusability for our brothers and sisters in need around the world. Protests against the globe marked the end of 2019 and tension and tensions arose more than ever in countries like Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, Honduras and others. The number of people living in precariousness keeps rising. It seems that violence keeps escalating.

In task as pastoral ministry, our Christian community is to follow Jesus’ example. The impact he made in the world needs to be extended. We need to put our faith into action and to listen to the voice of the oppressed. Jesus spoke about the majority who were and continue to be oppressed. He saw them as a flock with no shepherd and with hunger. Jesus also talked about the minority who oppressed others. (Mt 23:13). Jesus defended the weak and exposed the oppressors by his words. He lived in times of an external crisis. But his fidelity for the people who were less fortunate was an act of pure love.

Jesus calls us to look with mercy to our struggling brothers and sisters. He invites us to answer God’s call of misfortune, even if they do not thank us. Jesus didn’t do good for recognition. He invited those who followed him to receive happiness (Mt 5:3-12, the Beatitudes). He continues to embrace the marginalized and sinners and sits with them. He is happy that God is revealed to them, and through metanoia, many chose this radical change of heart.

Jesus is asking us to look to others with brotherly and sisterly love. He is appealing to our hearts to share what we have and to follow him (Mt 10:17). The peace of the world depends on each of us. Our communities cannot be indifferent to the suffering of others. This is our call: “to take up the cross and follow him” (Mt 16:24). Let us make Jesus the center of our lives. Jesus have mercy on me and guide me!

Easter Sunday

Greg Erlandson

Perspectives

A crisis that may be an opportunity

“Never let a serious crisis go to waste,” said former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. His adage came to mind as I surveyed the human and economic wreckage strewn in the wake of the coronavirus.

Also known as COVID-19, the virus is slashing through the world’s countries, continent by continent. Some countries have done a good job of testing and identifying those likely infected. Others are not one of them. This leaves us a bit in the dark, with some people saying millions may eventually be infected and others doubting the concern of the experts.

Governments and organizations can no longer wait for definitive data, however, and must act today to break the spread of the disease. If this is our new reality—standing six feet apart and giving each other a wave—let’s not let this crisis go to waste.

There was another crisis not long ago. The #MeToo movement sent a wave of articles about the upside of a stock market down slide. People were going to stop buying material, pundits predicted. We looked at the vanished fortunes and the jobs lost after the wealth-obessed frenzy of the early 2000s. Will we feel the same way now, or is it not who we wanted to be, people said.

For a moment, people talked about focusing on family and friends. This focused on their priorities in order and dropping out of the rat race. This seems like a long time ago. The gap between rich and poor, in fact, the gap between rich and not so rich, has grown more pronounced, and until recently the stock market was soaring into the stratosphere, showing at times the irrational exuberance of bull markets past.

Until now.

Which brings us to our current crisis and the social upheaval it is causing. Disneyland closing, sports arenas shuttered, stocks taking a backflip into the 1990s. Business owners have been hit the hardest, being forced to close up shop, layoff workers and small businesses try to “right size” themselves. We have even been hit by the death of the middle class. The middle class people who are not just from the disease, but from the shockwaves of the disease.

Some of us are still working. Some of us are not. Some of us are taking dramatic steps to curb the virus, and we must pray for their success. But we cannot stay in a state of paralysis.

First, gratitude. For those of us who can wait until the stocks rebound, for those of us whose families have not been harmed badly by the virus or its shockwaves, for those of us who have had the luxury of feeling more connected by the closures, and the social distancing, let’s give thanks. Gratitude is our spiritual immune system telling us in we really do have all we need.

Second, resist the fear. When a crisis hits, we have two choices: give in to the fear or resist it. There moments early in a crisis when the news media and social media can whip us into a frothy mess of speculation and rumor. It’s one thing to be fearful, but not fomenting fear or resist it. There is a moment early in a crisis when we should bearde the opportunity to change—change for the better.

Third, stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about others. That is the antidote to fear. And, third, stop thinking about our own needs and the public’s needs. Governments and organizations can no longer wait for definitive data, however, and must act today to break the spread of the disease. If this is our new reality—standing six feet apart and giving each other a wave—let’s not let this crisis go to waste.

The World’s Original Benefit Plan

Greg Erlandson, director and editor-in-chief of Catholic News Service, can be reached at gerd@catnews.org.

Easter Sunday

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The Sunday Readings

Sunday, April 5, 2020

- Matthew 21:1-11
- Isaiah 50:4-7
- Philippians 2:6-11
- Matthew 26:14-27:66

This weekend, the Church observes Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, recalling with such great reverence and intensity Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, bringing us into Holy Week. The liturgy includes two readings from the Gospels. The first occurs at the blessing of the palms, and as the palms are thumped upon, the faithful bearing the palms assemble. It reveals both the Lord’s divine power, seen through Christ’s knowledge that a donkey and colt are in the village ahead, and the mission of Jesus as Messiah. Jesus is approaching Jerusalem, more than just a city in pious Jewish minds, but the holiest place in which God’s temple stands, where David once reigned as king, and where the prophets spoke in the name of God. It was, and still is, the center of Jewish faith and culture. It was to be the site of the culmination of the Lord’s mission on Earth. The crowd proclaimed him as “son of David,” greeting Jesus as their own legitimate king, David’s heir, repudiating the despised Roman emperor (Mt 21:9). It sets the stage for Good Friday. The Romans allowed no one to short-change the emperor. For its next reading, the Church gives us a passage from the third part of Isaiah, one of those eloquent and expressive sections of Isaiah called by biblical scholars the “songs of the suffering servant.” Poetic and descriptive, these four songs land an unflinchingly faithful, full servant of God, who despite abuse and persecution, remains steadfastly loyal. Christians have always seen Jesus prefigured in these beautiful poems. In the next reading, from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians, the stress again prefigured in these beautiful poems. In the next reading, from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians, the stress again prefigured in these beautiful poems.

The Criterion  Friday, April 3, 2020

My Journey to God

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Way of the Cross

By Thomas J. Rillo

Jesus carried the wooden cross to Calvary. He shouldered the load for you and me. The way the cross was crucified there on the cross he was nailed and died. Scripture reveals that the cross we bear will be heavy and burdensome and not fair. The way of the cross is the way to God. With faith in our hearts this way we trod.

Growing closer to God is always our goal. Listening to God’s word is to save our soul. Prayer’s words to God are the steppingstones. The way of the cross is always clearly shown.

The way of the cross is the way to the Lord. It is the road of our travel the way to the door of God. The way to the Lord is the path of the cross. We carry our heavy cross and we do not despair. We journey the way of the cross with love and care.

Jesus' human and divine natures are seen in his tears for Lazarus

Q. I have always been attracted to the verse in St. John’s Gospel that says, “that, learning of the death of Lazarus, Jesus wept” (John 11:35). It shows, I think, how much Christ loved Lazarus and all of humanity. But reflecting further on that passage, I'm wondering just why Jesus wept.

A. That short and simple verse from the Gospel reflects a complex truth, a truth that prompts your excellent question and moves the answer difficult. Jesus had two natures: He was truly human and truly divine, and both natures were at work in the matter of Lazarus. Pope Leo the Great, reflecting on this same passage, is thought to have said: “In his humanity Jesus wept for Lazarus; in his divinity, he raised him from the dead.” Jesus felt deeply the pain of Lazarus’ death. When Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus of the impending crisis, their message had been, “Master, the one you love is ill” (John 11:3). Clearly, Jesus knew in advance what he was going to do, for he told them, “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God” (John 11:4). But his awareness of that eventual outcome did not relieve Christ’s human sorrow, and this is the mystery of his two natures. And so, the answer to our letter writer’s questions is “Yes.”

Jesus was truly grieving over Lazarus’ passing and the pain it was causing Martha and Mary, but just as surely he knew that the situation would serve ultimately to glorify God. The mystery of that duality will only lift fully when we, one day, rest in God’s house. But meanwhile, it may help to think that, right now, we ourselves struggle to balance those twin feelings. When someone we love dies, our faith promises the afterworld; yet, even so, we feel deeply the sting of loss. We believe in eternal life, but that doesn’t stop our tears. (Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Colonnade Circle Dr., Albany, New York 12203.)

Send material for consideration to “My Journey to God,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367 or e-mail to shoefler@archindy.org.
PRIESTS
continued from page 6

Christ, we are better able to accept adversity without losing hope, and share that hope with others during difficult times.

“IT is when it gets dark that you can see the smallest flickers of light. We can be that small light, and we will help someone else who is struggling in the dark. The overall message will be one of looking forward with hope, not fear; patience, not despair; love, not guardedness.

“There are a lot of silver linings in the storm clouds ahead that we can help people by pointing them out.”

Celebrating Easter
Father Riebe believes that “Easter will be experienced by many of us in a new and a much deeper way this year.

“Easter is the story of new life, new beginnings,” he said. “It’s the story of the power of God to bring new life from death.

While we may not be able to celebrate Holy Week in our usual manner this year, all the same, las Paasch candles around the world will be blessed and lit in the early darkness of Holy Saturday night, with or without a congregation. That light and the victory that it symbolizes will be carried into our churches and will be waiting for us when we return—whenever that may be.”

Relying upon the grace of God
For Father Hollowell, this period of “social distancing” has been a blessing in some ways, giving him an opportunity to experience increased times of “quiet and stillness.” But that blessing has also involved challenges.

“There have been some periods of being fearful, doubt and confusion . . . every cross given has also come with a corresponding grace to carry it. And there are many friends and family, and relationships and responsibilities which have been a source of renewal right when I needed it, especially my relationship with God.”

“Through these graces, I continue to believe that God has always experienced [that] my ultimate source of strength does not lie in sociological or medical strategies. My hope lies in the Providence of God who is always at work in the world as a healer and a savior.

Taking our direction from Christ
In conversations about the coronavirus crisis, Father Wadelot said that many people ask, “Does God have a plan in mind for all of this?” Here’s his answer.

“I don’t believe that God sent the coronavirus into the world with some plan in mind. However, we can take direction from Christ on how to deal with adversity. We can choose to work with God to bring something positive out of the situation. We can resist the tendency toward fear, and instead turn toward God to pray for a cure.

“Also, I feel a strange sense of being united with people right now in a special way because we all have this common enemy we are trying to defeat. There are all sorts of lessons we could learn from that.”

Living the Mass
During this time and always, Father Hollowell said, the greatest goals we have as Christians are, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39-40).

“At the end of the day, the most important thing is living the Mass,” he said. “It is always possible to live in our very bodies the love of the one whose sacrifice we commemorate at every Mass. “Even outside of this current pandemic, most Catholics do not become holy by attending or watching daily Mass. They become holy by surrendering to the will of God, which often looks like getting up early to go to work, taking care of children when they are sick or need help, and never having a moment to yourself.

“The summit of the Mass is found in Christ’s words, ‘This is my body, given up for you. Take of it and eat it in remembrance of me.”’

USCCB effort will help parishes assist pregnant and parenting moms

By Natalie Hoeter

Eleven months ago, Brine Anne Varick gave birth to her little girl, her and her husband’s first child. Her recovery was an eye-opening experience.

Having a flexible job, maternity leave, help of a husband with paternity leave and meals from a supportative faith community were “a blessing,” she says.

“But it was still hard,” Varick admits. “Try recovering physically when you haven’t slept a solid four hours in weeks!”

The experience made her reflect on single mothers without similar support.

How do single moms earning minimum wage afford all the expenses of having and raising a baby? How do they get child care when most day care centers have a 3-month minimum age requirement? How do they afford utilities, stress of pregnancy and parenting if they don’t have a network of support?

All Catholic, health care professionals and students are welcome! www.tfc4all.org

Such concerns make Varick, archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity coordinator, excited about the launching of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) “Walking with Moms in Need” year of service. The effort began on March 25 and will end on the same date in 2021.

“This effort is definitely needed,” she says. “We have a lot of organizations, non-profits, parishes, and archdiocesan programs that are waiting to be utilized, and want—and need—to share these resources.”

Parishes best know local needs and resources
The year of service provides parishes, deaneries and dioceses “an opportunity to assess, expand and communicate resources to pregnant moms and families in need,” according to the USCCB’s web page about “Walking with Moms in Need.”


Accordingly, the USCCB’s pro-life committee is coordinating ongoing outreach. Its chairman, Archbishop Joseph E. Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., announced the effort in a letter to U.S. bishops late last year.

“The challenges can be immense for women in difficult pregnancies, especially women in poverty,” the letter states. “According to 2014 statistics from abortion providers, women who chose abortion were poor, young, and unmarried: 75 percent were low income, 60 percent were in their 20’s, and 86 percent were unmarried.”

The letter notes that women in difficult or crisis pregnancies “should see the Church as a place where they can find help, especially with its myriad of social services and organizations dedicated to meeting the needs of people in crisis.

“But do we have an accurate picture of what is available, and how can we best communicate that?”

The U.S. bishops were encouraged to invite the parishes in their dioceses to take part in the “Walking with Moms in Need” effort.

In February, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson sent a letter to priests in the archdiocese encouraging them to enroll in the parish participation effort.

“Every region is different, every community is unique, and every parish is one-of-a-kind,” Archbishop Thompson states in his letter. “Your parish is best positioned to identify the local pregnancy [and parenting] help resources that are currently available, and to recognize potential gaps in need to be addressed.”

“A central place to go to find local resources
The first step in the initiative for participating parishes includes praying for single pregnant and parenting mothers, and raising awareness of the challenges they face.

Each participating parish will then create a core team. Using tools, tips and resources on the USCCB’s “Walking with Moms in Need” website, they will identify and report local support for single mothers.

Examples include parish- and Catholic-sponsored ministries, faith- and secular-based food banks, pregnancy care centers, adoption services, maternity homes, hospitals, social service agencies, and more.

The results will be reported to Varick. Ultimately, she says, “The archdiocese will have a website that will highlight resources, a database so that there will be a central place for people to go if they are looking for help for themselves or a mother in need.

She adds that the temporary closing of parishes in response to the coronavirus has delayed the progress of the initiative’s first steps.

But parish leaders can still “press on now, while we’re in our homes waiting through this uncertain time,” Varick says. “And we can start using social media to raise awareness of the challenges these women face and the places we know of in our local communities who can help.”

“We do support them and their choice for life”
This year of service for pregnant and parenting moms “is so needed,” says Varick. “The pro-life movement is making an emphasis on loving both the baby and the mother. This initiative gives people a way to live out this message.”

Finding and identifying resources will be helpful, she says. But no inventory will be of use if it is not communicated and promulgated.

“I hope that each parish will look at ways to better communicate the list of resources they identify, so that anyone in any particular parish or neighborhood would know where to send a pregnant woman or mother in need if were to ask for help.”

When information is lacking about available resources, Varick continues, “programs can be duplicated, while other areas of need might remain.”

“If we can have a better idea of what is available, we can share our resources with each other and focus our efforts, time, finances and volunteers to fill the areas where we see needs.

“This [year of service] is our opportunity to show these women they are loved, and that we do support them and their decision to choose life.”

For more information on the USCCB’s “Walking with Moms in Need” year of service, tools, resources and a suggested timeline, go to walkingwithmomsinneed. org. For questions or help in implementing this project in your parish, contact Brine Anne Varick at 317-236-1543 or e-mail bvarick@archindy.org. To order “Walking with Moms in Need” prayer cards, go to www_ARCHINDY Ard.
Forgiveness of sins:
In another statement posted at the archdiocesan website on March 25, Archbishop Thompson announced that, because of the pandemic, “until further notice requests for individual confession should be postponed and it is requested by one who is in imminent danger of death.”

The same statement also noted the Church’s teaching that sacramental confession and absolution are unavailable, forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones, is available through what the Church calls “perfect contrition” (see Catechism of the Catholic Church #4152).

Perfect contrition occurs when the following conditions are met:
• A person is sorry for his or her sins out of their love of God.
• That sorrow is expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (such as an act of contrition).
• There is an intention to go to sacramental confession as soon as it is offered.

“The Church never asks us to do the impossible, and always is interested in the salvation of souls,” Father Beidelman said. “And so, even in this extraordinary time where we don’t have widespread availability to individual confession and absolution, the Church still allows for that opportunity, perfect contrition.”

Although Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb issued a stay-at-home order that became effective on March 25, priests in cases of imminent danger is still allowed.

Father Beidelman said that, in such circumstances, priests can minister “with an abundance of caution and in great cooperation with local public officials and professionals who can make that happen in whatever way they determine.”

“Hopefully those situations are few and far between, but we know that there are going to be some,” he said. “Some people are really going to be in very grave circumstances, in harm’s way. The more people that can stay at home, the better.”

INDULGENCES

can be used on their own or while viewing www.archindy.org in the coming days and being developed to facilitate the prayer of “rooted in the liturgies themselves” are Mauro Piacenza, head of the Apostolic forms of devotion, according to Cardinal celebration of Mass or the recitation of the faithful enter more fully into Holy Week.

Those who are sick and their care are asked, where possible, to visit the eucharistic adoration. Alternatively, [they can] read the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour or recite the rosary or the Way of the Cross,” he said.

The faithful can claim the indulgence for themselves or offer it on behalf of someone who has died.

The website of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has also created a special link on its website to a page offering various resources for the nation’s Catholics as they weather the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Among the many resources on the USCCB page are lists of websites for Mass being livestreamed by various outlets, such as Catholic TV and EWTN, on various Internet platforms; links to prayers for an end to COVID-19.

Vacant confirms Pope Francis does not have COVID-19

ROME (CNS) — Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, the papal vicar for Rome, was hospitalized after testing positive for the COVID-19 virus, the Diocese of Rome announced.

“The tests revealed, showing some symptoms” on March 30, the 66-year-old cardinal was tested, the diocese said; when the test came back positive, he was hospitalized at the Church-owned Gemelli hospital.

“He has a fever, but his general condition is good, and he has begun anti-viral therapy,” the diocesan statement said.

Those who were working in close contact with Cardinal De Donatis have been advised to observe preventive self-isolation, it added.

According to Vatican News, the cardinal had very few meetings in recent days and “declared that he had not been at the Vatican” since the coronavirus outbreak began; instead, he has maintained “only telephone contact with the pontiff.”

While the pope is the Bishop of the Diocese of Rome, the papal vicar exercises most of the powers of a local bishop and presides over a curia with most of the usual offices found in the charitable Church’s large archdiocese, including a diocesan Caritas and offices for personnel, religious education and personnel affairs.

“I, too, am living this trial,” Cardinal De Donatis said in a statement on March 30. “I am living this time with the support of the prayers of all of you, dear faithful of the church of Rome. I am doing this moment as an occasion provision has given me to share the suffering of many of our brothers and sisters,” he said. “I offer my prayers for you, for the entire diocese community and for the inhabitants of the city of Rome.”

Cardinal vicar of Rome hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19

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This Lent your call reverberates urgently: “Be converted!” “Return to me with all your heart.” (Jl 2:12). You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgment, but of our judgment: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. We can look to so many exemplary companions for the journey, who, even though fearful, have reacted by giving their lives. 

This is the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and genuine self-denial. It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people—often forgotten people—who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but whose face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer. How many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Faith begins when we realize we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient: by ourselves we flounder; we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. 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 things 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 a 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: The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look toward those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf. Is 42:3) that never fails, and let us allow hope to be rekindled.

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to overcome all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter’s rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the Stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God’s blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is not the absence of fear. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: “Do not be afraid.” (Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, “cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us” (cf. 1 Pet 5:7).

POPE continued from page 1

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Kathleen McChesney, a former FBI executive assistant director and the first person to lead the U.S. bishops’ Office of Child and Youth Protection, will receive the 2020 Laetare Medal from the University of Notre Dame. 

"It is often the Church’s darkest moments that call forth great faith and courage," said Notre Dame’s president, Holy Cross Father John Jenkins, in announcing the award. 

He said the university is recognizing McChesney’s efforts in response to the Church’s abuse crisis and honoring her "courage, tenacity and love for the Church in a tireless pursuit of justice for victims, accountability for abusers and measures that prevent this crisis from continuing.”

When she heard she was to receive the award, McChesney said it would further challenge her.

"I think there is a significant responsibility with such an honor that one has to live up to every day forward. The Laetare Medal will inspire me to work harder, more effectively and with greater compassion on behalf of those who have been wounded by persons in Catholic ministries,” she said in a statement.

The announcement was made on March 22, Laetare Sunday, which is the fourth Sunday of Lent. The medal, which has been given to Catholic leaders since 1883, is presented during graduation ceremonies, a date which is currently in question in the minds of many college students and faculty members due to coronavirus shutdowns.

Past Laetare Medal recipients include President John F. Kennedy; Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement; Chicago Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin; labor activist Mgr. George H. Higgins; jazz composer Dave Brubeck; Jesuit Father Greg Boyle, founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries; and Sister Norma Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, who is executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and a long-time advocate for immigrants and refugees.

McChesney was hired by the U.S. bishops in November 2002 as the first to lead the child and youth protection office set up to help dioceses and eparchies apply prevention policies and to monitor their implementation. The office was established by the bishops in their 2002 “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” which detailed the Church’s policies for the prevention of child sexual abuse.

The former FBI official stayed in the job two years. When she announced she would be leaving the position in 2004, she told Catholic News Service the major achievements of the still-new office at the time were “public accountability” and “public accounting” by the bishops regarding sex abuse.

“That didn’t exist before,” she said.

She cited new procedures such as the annual audit process, which includes data on new allegations and the amount of money spent yearly on sex abuse issues, a study on the nature and scope of the problem by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York covering the period 1950-2002. Other new policies included background checks for thousands of clergy and lay church employees and volunteers and sex abuse prevention courses for thousands of church workers and millions of children.

When she left her office, she was quick to warn the crisis was not over.

“We’re beginning to establish the mechanisms that will tell us whether the crisis is abating. It’s never going to go away as long as you have victims,” she said.

She said, at the time, that her 31-year career in law enforcement was helpful in her work, especially in providing guidance and referrals to victims who contacted her office.

McChesney worked for seven years in the King County Police Department in Seattle. Then for nearly 25 years she worked with the FBI. When she left the FBI in 2002, she was executive assistant director for law enforcement services and the organization’s highest-ranking woman.

She founded Kinusable Management Consulting, where she continues to serve dioceses, religious organizations and others around the world in the protection of children and vulnerable adults and in preventing ministerial misconduct and abuse. 

McChesney, advocate for abuse victims, to receive Laetare Medal

Above, Pope Francis arrives for a prayer service in an empty St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on March 27. At the conclusion of the service the pope held the Eucharist as he gave an extraordinary blessing “urbi et orbi” (“to the city and the world”). The service was livestreamed in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)