

20 March 2020

Dear Parishioners,

It is commonplace now to say that we are in uncharted waters with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our civic duty requires us to act responsibly and take measures to contain the spread of the virus and to act with charity, generosity and justice to those around us.

On the spiritual level, too, the closure of our churches and the restriction of Masses to those without a congregation are measures difficult for all of us: "The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life" (LG 11). Yet the celebration of the Eucharist even by the priest alone always embraces the whole of the Church gathered around the altar, because it is always the action of Christ and his Mystical Body; the individual priest stands and acts, through his priestly ordination, in the place and stead of Christ himself. This is humbling for any priest, but a great consolation, too, for us all. We are not alone. Ever.

Like all the sacraments, the Eucharist takes its meaning and power from the Cross of Christ. Maybe it is a good time to reflect on this, on the meaning of the Cross. A crisis is always a good time to get back to basics, to take stock, to re-evaluate what is truly important in our lives, and especially in our spiritual lives.

We have an incredibly rich spiritual treasury in the Church: the writings of the saints, the writings about the saints; the writings about those who strove heroically to live life close to our God who offered his life for us. In the Catholic tradition, fellowship has always been key, but it is really the word "communion" which defines us. The striving of the saints has always been a striving for communion with Christ, who loved us to the point of surrendering all that he had been given by the Father in an abiding act of love for us.

A great saint of the twentieth century keeps coming to my mind, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein, who chose her name deliberately to describe her own striving during a time of great difficulty for Jews and former Jews like herself. Her name means literally, "Theresa, blessed of the Cross".

In 1941, under constant threat by Nazi aggression, she wrote her most famous work, *The Science of the Cross*, and in it she said this:

The union of our soul with God, for which it is created, *“is purchased through the Cross, perfected with the Cross, and sealed for all eternity with the Cross.”*

- Christ died once for us all, *purchasing* our redemption through his offering on the Cross;
- The saints are *sealed* with the sign of God, as we read in the striking and difficult imagery of the Book of Revelation: “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads”;
- And it is we, on our pilgrimage through this earthly life, who are *perfected* by the Cross.



The Cross is the instrument and means of our communion with Christ; but the Cross has been transformed into a symbol of glory, and so, in Christian art, we see images of Christ reigning from the Cross with a crown of kingship and glory. As the ancient Fathers of the Church often remarked, and as St. John’s account of the Passion of Christ implies, the Cross has become the throne of God, from which he reigns triumphant.

During these times, when the world seems to have slowed and stopped, when anxiety and worry is a daily accompaniment, why not draw on the incredible riches that Jesus has given us in his Church? So much is available on the internet; why not search for a work by or about one of the great saints: St. Catherine of Siena, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis de Sales (beautiful Sermons for Lent), St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, to name just a few?

Why not “commune” with the saints even now?

I am keeping all of you in my intentions at daily Mass, when we are gathered together, sacramentally, at the foot of the Cross, which has become the throne of glory.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Philip
Pastor
Resurrection and Assumption Parishes