

March 19, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Like most of you, I am still reeling from the additional restrictions that Governor Kate Brown announced earlier this week and that Archbishop Sample was forced to implement as a result. My mind was initially trying to process the shock of the crowd restriction of 25 or fewer people, which immediately signaled to me a temporary suspension of public Mass. However, that shock was surpassed once I did the internal math on the end date given (April 14<sup>th</sup>) for this restriction which meant that there would be no public celebration of Holy Week or Easter this year in Oregon. Since that initial announcement, it seems more changes have come on the hour both from the archdiocese and the state and on medical as well as financial fronts. As our staff tries to react to new information, I tell myself 100 times a day, in the words of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount that, "The troubles of today are enough for today"...that looking too far ahead only causes stress and anxiety...and even that I should modify this saying to, "the troubles of this hour are enough for this hour". In that spirit, I have decided that my letter to you would offer coping strategies to these changes in general rather than sharing my personal reaction to individual policy changes. By print date, those individual reactions would likely be outdated and irrelevant anyway. So here are a few thoughts I would like you all to consider:

1. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." – We often take things or relationships for granted in life. This is especially harmful or dangerous for the most important things or relationships...your spouse, your children, having your parents around, your faith life, the sacraments, etc. One of my hopes for each of us is that once we are on the other side of this crisis we will arrive with a regained appreciation for the Mass, for our religious liberties and our ability to attend Mass and a proper hunger and appreciation for the Eucharist.

2. When all opportunities for public worship are stripped away (a thing I never thought I would live to see) what is left of our faith life? What is revealed? This crisis is a rare opportunity to find the answer to that question and to develop more deeply our private prayer life. For priests like me, it is also a pretty powerful diagnostic about the health of our vocations. Too many priests today have grown to associate their priesthood with administrative duties or other superfluous stuff. At the heart of our priestly duties is

offering the Mass. This is a chance for priests to refocus as we celebrate private Masses for you and get back to celebrating them with our whole heart. For the laity, this is also a glimpse of the future for some regions as numbers of active priests diminish everywhere and a reminder to pray for vocations and not take the priesthood for granted.

3. Living without the Mass for a time puts us in solidarity with those in remote areas and those in regions of Christian persecution under communism or under Islamic rule, for instance, where the Mass has been banned legally. It also teaching solidarity with those who are homebound or separated from us by illness who are never able to come to Mass.

4. As I said last week, the best penances are those we do not choose for ourselves. Who among you could honestly say they would have chosen to give up Mass attendance for Lent? None of us. Yet this is certainly a powerful penance as we practice spiritual communion and deepen our thirst for the sacramental life.

5. God lets us know that, when it comes to crisis, he does not allow us to be harmed by such evils unless something greater can come as a result. I ask myself what greater good could come from this trial, which is a good "glass-half-full" meditation. Besides regaining a new appreciation for what we normally have, I thought of changes churches like ours are making in the way of technological improvements with communications. Our first livestreamed Mass included about 150 more people than our church would hold. My YouTube broadcasted class now allows well over 1000 people to follow us from across America. My first video message to you all as pastor was commented on by many and our improved website has been able to more effectively get information out to all of you. These kinds of changes are a roadmap to "future church" that will be better enabled to evangelize and reach out to our next generation.

These are just a few of my thoughts. Take courage in the meantime and stay strong until we can gather again publically in worship of our wonderful Lord. Continued blessings this Lent, which has truly become a Lent to remember.

Your Pastor,

Rev. Ken Sampson