

ST. MARY'S VISITATION

Catholic Parish Elm Grove, WI

March 22, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We certainly find ourselves in a very strange and unexpected situation and as I am writing this I am looking out at an empty parking lot on a Sunday when usually it is full of cars, who would have thought this was how things were going to unfold just a couple of weeks ago? I thought I would take this opportunity to greet all of you and let you know that you are in my daily prayers and to also bring you to speed on a few things and then share a few of my own reflections on things that have been going on in our world and in our country.

First, to address a few details on things:

- ❖ For those of you who have had scheduled Mass intentions for loved ones over these two weeks, know that these Masses are being offered by Fr. John, Fr. Dave and myself – so that the graces of those Masses can continue to help the souls of the faithful departed.
- ❖ A special thank you to those who have been coming to Perpetual Adoration, especially to those who have stepped up to fill hours for people who are not able to make it. This October will see the 35th Anniversary of Perpetual Adoration here and knowing there are people so faithfully praying is a true comfort in this time of challenge. I am hoping that we can maintain Adoration perpetually as long as possible and through the entirety of this situation, however, we will have to keep watch both on our ability of the Chapel to have people taking regular hours as well as any developments on the civil side of things. Due to the current circumstances, ONLY scheduled adorers will be allowed in the Adoration Chapel at this time. Please continue to visit our website for the most up to date developments related to the Chapel.
- ❖ I know that there are many people who are, right now, facing the loss of income, you are very much in my thoughts and prayers, I am sure this produces much anxiety and concern about what the future will hold for you and your family and we certainly understand that people may not be able to be as generous as they have been to the parish. At the same time, the parish is working on ways of managing our own cash flow and watching our expenses carefully to try and make it through this time. Can I ask everyone who has not seen a decrease in income due to the Coronavirus to continue to give where at all possible? The parish, thankfully, was in a very strong financial position going into this, but even the best of financial positions will be hurt by a long term decline in offertory – we would like to be able to continue to provide, especially, for our parish and school staff during this time. You can donate online, through the mail or dropping offertory off in the Rectory mail-slot. As I said before, I know many people and families are feeling a financial crunch, so I certainly understand that some will not be able to give what they have been giving.
- ❖ Thank you for your patience with the changes in our normal parish operating schedule and rhythms, every day seems to bring new guidance and new decisions that need to be made, we are trying to make them prudently with both an eye to the current circumstances as well as preparing for what may come next. Of

course no one knows, at this point, how long this will last, and we continue to take one day at a time while also trying to look to the future and to be prepared.

As I have watched the news develop and things unfold, I have been trying to discern what it is that the Holy Spirit is asking of us in all of this and a few thoughts have come to my mind and heart that I would like to share with you as you too think and pray. I am convinced that the Lord is trying to teach us something in the midst of all of this - I have no doubt that God has permitted this to come upon us for a reason, and I see various reasons that He has.

- ❖ I think the first is to reorient us back to God. No one can deny that our society (and too often ourselves as individuals) have lost sight that He is the center of all things and this attitude and disposition has even seeped its way into parts of the Church. I believe God is reminding us that He MUST be at the center of all things and when He is not things go astray.
- ❖ Secondly, I think He is reminding us that our first love should always be Him. As we see so many things which we too often place our love in are being shut down, we are reminded that they are never enduring - good food, sports, fashion, entertainment, shopping, financial achievement, etc. all of these come to an end - what does endure is our love of God and we must orient our lives, once again, with Him and our love for Him at the center of our lives.
- ❖ Thirdly, I think the Lord is reminding us that we need to hunger for His presence in the Eucharist - we can all take His Real Presence in the Eucharist for granted. By not being able to regularly receive Him, I believe He is reminding us to never take the Eucharist for granted, and, along with that, to never receive Him in the Eucharist unworthily. The Church teaches that when one receives the Eucharist in the state of mortal sin, they grievously. This has been lost sight of in a world that diminishes the reality of sin. I have found it interesting that right now, with the public celebration of Mass ceased, with priests struggling to get into nursing homes or hospitals to anoint the sick, that the one sacrament which is still readily available is the Sacrament of Penance - I think this is a sign from the Lord that we have not availed ourselves of that sacrament enough. This time can teach us to hunger for the Eucharist and to make sure we only receive Him while in the state of grace.
- ❖ Fourthly, I think the Lord is asking us to slow down - our culture is full of constant activity and that is not conducive to prayer or self-reflection or even solid family life. This virus is forcing us to slow down, to spend more time with our families and makes time for prayer. There are holes in our schedules right now, holes in our daily routine - with what will we fill them? With technology? With movies and television? With anxiety and worry? We are being asked to take these holes and to fill them with prayer and with love of neighbor and with love for our families and friends.
- ❖ Finally, I believe the Lord is calling us to repent of our own sinfulness, our own selfishness, our own self-absorption. When we are confronted with an illness that causes suffering and possibly rather sudden death, we recognize our own mortality and how our time here on earth will only go for so long - are we prepared?

I believe that God is asking us to do some real soul searching, as a culture, as individuals and how we live out our Catholic faith and how faithful we are to it. It's a challenging time - it is the Lent that none of us would have asked for, but that God is allowing us to experience - for our good. In light of all of this, we must also trust God and turn to Him more fully and completely and to not be afraid. May we hold closely in our prayers all those who are ill and their families and, in particular, those who have died. Please know that I am praying for all of you, most especially at Mass. I hope this time passes swiftly, but whatever may come, or for however long it may last, may we use it to draw closer to God and allow Him to convert our hearts more fully. We can take great assurance that Christ always wins. May we, through His mercy, be given a share in that victory.

Fr. Peter