

BECOMING THE PARISH GOD CALLS US TO BE

These have been unprecedented times. It is my prayer from the chapel at the rectory, and sometimes in the emptiness of the church, that everyone be safe and healthy. In these times the glory of God is still proclaimed in our ministries that continue to serve under the new guidelines of stay in place and social distancing. Your outreach to the food pantry, PADS and the St. Vincent de Paul Society has been exceptional. Your commitment to the parish through the sacrifices you are making and the offerings of what you can, are amazing. We are a blessed parish. While news trickles out and more pain is shared, we are challenged to be present with our faith in the Lord Jesus. When I hear of the loss of jobs in our community, I am heartbroken. When I hear of hours being cut and furloughs happening, it causes me to grieve. Families and households in our parish are deeply affected and I long to walk with you in solidarity. Our Apostolic Administrator Bishop Pates, after consultation with the financial office of the diocese, put into place budget cuts across the entire diocese. Everyone, priests included, has taken a reduction in pay. Less use of energy, less waste management pickup and less Easter flowers are some ways we are quickly cut costs. As time moves forward, we will find more.

These are times like no other. In the midst of this, our staff working remotely has done a fantastic job at doing all they can to be present to the community. Hours of connecting with families of RE and High School has happened utilizing new platforms. Our deacons have made phone calls, others have made connection using Zoom, so that what needs to be shared is continually happening. I am proud of all of them. I, like many, am still not prepared as to what to do next. Dates for the celebration of Sacraments are pushed back, but how far? All of this is yet to be written in stone, yet families want to know so plans can be made. There is also a lot of second guessing on my part and the fluidity of the situation keeps changing.

I would also like to thank the technology team that has helped us jump leaps and bounds. Jan was in contact with Lucy Koepele and our website team. Rick Llanes helped me learn to download a new app so as to upload my videos of Mass. New signal boosts happened because Dave Van Boekel checked connections and things are starting to come together. I am indebted to John Kilpatrick who is a parishioner who stepped up to help with taping our Masses. He is a regular at the 7:30 Mass and he got us up running sooner than ever imagined. God came through.

I ask you to keep me and the staff in your prayers, and to please be patient with us.

Be assured we are praying for all of you,



Father John

NOTHING IS THE SAME, NOR WILL IT EVER BE...

These words of truth are more present now at this Easter than ever before. We are surrounded by death. Each number is a life; each life is a story and a connection. Each person is someone's child and a child of God. Fear is settling in and becoming a companion on our journey. The emptiness and loss of what Easter used to look like is present in our thoughts and minds. Nothing is the same, nor will it ever be. I have often asked the question, and maybe you have as well, why is all this happening? What does all this mean? Answers are fewer and harder to find than the questions.

I am drawn into today's Gospel, of two disciples running to a tomb to check out the story that they had heard. It is an unbelievable and unthinkable story. The body of Jesus is gone. With every stride, their minds had to contemplate what all this meant and not only if it was true, but what did it mean. The Gospel goes on to say the faster disciple arrived first and looked in. He saw the burial cloths. After Simon Peter arrives and enters, the disciple who was there first follows and then he sees and believes. I have thought a lot about that space in time of the faster disciple. He sees, he then begins to process what he has witnessed and he begins to reflect. He has time to possibly integrate what he is seeing before Simon Peter arrives. He then enters more deeply to find his belief that Jesus is risen and Jesus is Lord. I think the space in time, that gap, is where we are now. We are seeing the world differently. Everything that we once knew is now changed, the unimaginable is all around us. We are seeing great suffering and stories of overcoming obstacles. We are wondering how can this be and we are finding others whose hearts are so filled with creative love that they are sending messages with chalk or technology. The pain of a world changed surrounds us. We are all in the process of asking, what does this all mean? It took courage for the faster disciple to enter in more deeply and to believe. It took time for him to process what he saw when he peered into the tomb. It took time. We don't know how slow Simon Peter was. We are in this gap of time and we are invited to allow it to strengthen us for the opportunity of when we have the courage to enter in more fully and deepen our belief. This will happen. The Holy Spirit promised and will lead us in. That is when it will happen.

When the death of the way things used to be surrounds us, there is just one way to go, to the place of new life. It was in a tomb, a place of death, that the faith of the disciples was strengthened. We must begin the process of courage. We must look at the messiness and see the potential and the gift of new life. We have something maybe others do not, faith in Jesus the Christ who has overcome death. We have something maybe others do not, belief in the commitment of Jesus our Savior to save us. It is okay to be living in this gap in time, where what we see is scary, unthinkable and unimaginable. It is real and the fear and grief is real. We have been given this time to find the courage to believe.

Nothing is the same, nor will it ever be. I choose to enter into the depth of the darkened tomb into a place of death, all the while trusting and believing. Realize the faster disciple did not do this instantaneously. It took him time while he waited for Simon Peter to arrive and enter in. Only then could he follow. We are all in this together. God is patient with us. God will give us as much time as we need to enter in and believe.

May the gift of the Resurrection of the Lord bring you a peace only He can give.

Happy Easter,



Reverend John J. Ouper