

BLESSINGS GIVEN, BLESSINGS RECEIVED

We give thanks to God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us. We give thanks for the many blessings He has allowed us to share and use to impact the lives of others.

This Thanksgiving, for many, has come with difficult decisions. From travel decisions to who can safely gather around a table, there is a sadness that cloaks this holiday. The restrictions on visits to hospitals and nursing home facilities have all been changed. Not being able to visit a few houses to make sure our loved ones get to see everyone has also challenged us. The desire to gather has intensified and the sadness of making wise decisions has crippled some of our spirits. There will be many families who lost loved ones to the virus who will be celebrating alone. There will be medical staff who will be on call and working COVID floors apart from their loved ones. The pain and separation touches us all and unites us all. I know it was difficult for me to inform the family I was not comfortable hosting Thanksgiving this year. My older brother with the biggest house considered hosting, but in the final analysis, decided it was best that we Zoom a gathering and stay safely apart. This comes at a cost. The conversation around a table is different from a conversation on a computer screen. All of this has changed our preparations, but it doesn't have to determine our spirit. What it means to be thankful is now more realized than ever before. What we took for granted is now being looked at differently. For me, smaller portion sizes, fewer side dishes and more time to reflect has brought some clarity. I will cherish all the more the next time we gather for Thanksgiving. I will cherish all the more being in the moment. I will cherish all the more the need to simplify.

With the money I will save by not providing a Thanksgiving meal for the family, I will be donating to those in need. It is a reminder of those in other places who also cherish warmth, a meal and to know they are not forgotten. May we take this time to make sure no one is forgotten. Everyone deserves our support and our blessing.



Father John

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

As we come to the end of a liturgical year with this celebration of the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, it is our opportunity to reflect on the year. It is our opportunity to see the fingerprint and activity of God that has been poured forth into the world. Put in that perspective, what a year it has been! The doors of the church were locked for Easter, loved ones are still not able to enter health facilities to be with family as God calls them home. Schools try to find ways to educate and COVID fatigue has become a real thing that unites us. Into this place, on this weekend, we proclaim Jesus as King. At this point, we might be closer to the realization of the Kingdom than ever before. In the First Reading, the Lord God proclaims He will seek out the lost, He will bring back the stray and He will bind up the injured and heal the sick. These are important commitments that God has rendered about His Kingdom. We might very well fit into most of those categories. These times have been very difficult. These times have tested us in ways we might not have thought possible. The Gospel invites us to realize we are to seek out those who are in need. We are the ones to visit prisoners, bring food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. This Kingdom is to be interactive. Although how that interaction happens has changed, it still is to happen.

When I look back, I recall how the great intimacy with God flourished in quiet and simply profound ways. The deacons called our homebound with a wellness check. That simple call on the phone was an intimate personal connection, an outreach. It was magnificent to hear how this dialing of numbers made such an impact. Sister Margaret Anne worked with families to have their children Baptized privately and this has allowed the simplicity of the Sacrament to become louder since everything has been scaled down. The parking lot gathering celebrating the Anointing of the Sick was so well orchestrated and healing took place with windows rolled down. Led by Jan, the efforts to reopen and be safe at Mass brought together volunteers and committed helpers to undertake what seemed impossible and make it all work. Religious Education of all age groups moved to electronic media for the time being. What was essential became the only education needed. While everything changed, nothing really did, because God's grace prevailed.

As we move to reflect back on a liturgical year that was, I see incredible intimacy with God. I see so many overcoming obstacles. I see a new hunger for the Eucharist. Beyond it all, I realize the King is still seeking, the King is still healing, still promising and still forgiving. Christ the King has not changed. To me, this is the most important lesson of this year. I am not far away from all the celebrations of the Eucharist that I celebrated alone in my chapel in front of the King present in the tabernacle. The intimacy and quiet of those moments were unique and like nothing I experienced before. Raising up the Eucharist standing only two feet in front of the tabernacle while consuming Jesus, He consumed me with an overpowering presence.

We are blessed by a King who still seeks us out.



Father John Ouper