

4th Sunday Lent A

This is the first weekend in my life as a priest without the public celebration of the Mass on a Sunday. It is a weird feeling not to see you all sitting here in the pews. What I have in front of me are mostly empty pews. At least this is St. Claire Chapel and a smaller space. I am sure it would feel still more weird if it were to be in the main church with so many empty pews. Not to be able to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with the people is a pain that is indescribable. I know how you feel about it. Not to be able to participate in the Holy Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord is a pain that is impossible to express in words. I can understand that pain. Of course, you can receive Spiritual Communion. But it is not the same. That is only the second best. Yet, in these circumstances, it has great value. The first reading reminds us that the Lord looks at the heart. We also miss that physical closeness of community and fellowship. Here is a letter I received from a couple belonging to our parish. They have been quarantining for nearly a month: “Dear Father Jose, This Lent I feel like I am in the desert. I am only able to get through this with the help of the Holy Spirit, and still it is hard. But many lessons are being learned in giving up things for the good of others. That is what _____ and I are missing most; our friends, fellowship community. Oh so difficult. We were truly created for family and community. I think and pray for you every day. I really miss you, your thoughtful teachings . . .” It is a beautiful letter. We need that community and fellowship.

I am very grateful that we have set up this live stream so that we can come together in prayer even when that is not possible in one place physically. I am delighted that we can still have a sense of community even when that is coming together in front of a TV or computer to pray. I hope all of you out there are actively participating with us—singing and praying together. I am very grateful to Clayton Beck and Alan Valenti who worked for hours and hours setting up this live stream and fine-tuning it. They did it all in a short notice. Thanks, Clayton and Alan! I know you can see me and hear me, but I just wish I could see you all as well. At the beginning of the homily, I usually ask if there are any visitors. I forgot to ask that today. So, do we have any visitors who have joined us today on the live stream? I see the Colwells. They are from Payette, Idaho. Also Rielly Hill, Matsy and Chrstie from Ontario. Although I cannot hear you, I hope you can hear me.

Every challenge, every trial, every cross the Lord sends us is to strengthen us. So we have to look at the positive side of this crisis. Maybe this crisis is going to help us grow in our love for the Eucharist. Maybe this is going to help us understand better the pain of our persecuted brothers and sisters who do not have the Eucharist for months in China, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, and other parts of the world. Maybe the Lord wants us to practice more the second greatest commandment—to love our neighbor, especially the elderly and the vulnerable. Maybe the Lord wants to build the domestic church—the family stronger. Prayer is the foundation of that domestic church—the family. You have more time as a family to pray together and grow in faith.

You do have free access to “Catholic Netflix.” That is called [Formed.org](https://www.formed.org). Go to our parish website, scroll toward the bottom of the Home page, and you will find [Formed.org](https://www.formed.org) as well as the parish code. Click on it to create an account, using the parish code, and enjoy unlimited Catholic movies, talks, educational videos, e-Books, and much more. It is all free. (Of course, the Church pays for it.) We are still very busy here at St. Francis Church trying to change things, adjust things, and reach out to you as much as we can. We are live-streaming all the liturgies from at the regular times on the weekdays. We have the usual weekday Masses followed by the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Holy Rosary. We expose the Blessed Sacrament for your private adoration from home. So make use of the time the Lord has given you fruitfully so that we can someday come out of it stronger in faith, stronger in our love for God, stronger in our love for our neighbor, stronger in our love for the Church Community, and stronger in our love for the Holy Eucharist.

As believers in the power of God's saving action, we are called to place all our trust in God and, at the same, do whatever we can to stop the spread of diseases—however inconvenient that may be for us personally—as a nation or as a Church. Today is Laetare or joyful Sunday because we have crossed the half-way mark to the celebration of Easter. True joy comes only when we are able to carry our crosses.

The other day I got a message on my Facebook page. Two men were walking, carrying their crosses, while making their journey to Heaven. One complained that it was too heavy. So he cut off a small piece of the cross. A while later he felt that it was still too heavy. So he cut off another piece. He did that multiple times, and his cross was now only 4 feet and very easy to carry. Then they came to a crater on their path that was 10 feet wide and 50 feet deep. The man who had not cut his cross shorter used his 12-foot cross to span the crater, walked across on it to get to the other side easily, and continued his journey. When the other man arrived, he could not cross the crater. His cross could not help him. It was too short.

Bearing our daily crosses gives us the strength to face the challenges of our lives and bring true joy. The Lord has sent us many unexpected crosses this Lent. Let us carry our crosses without complaints.