

March 15, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

God bless you.

Our readings this weekend focus on water - living water - and our thirst for Christ. As many of you may know, in every Missionaries of Charity Chapel all over the world are the words "I Thirst", painted on the wall next to the hung crucifix. There is a mutual thirst - our thirst for Christ, and His thirst for us.

Over these next two weeks, we are being asked to offer a different kind of Eucharistic Sacrifice - to not receive the source and summit of our faith - the Eucharist. Some of you have expressed your sadness and pain over this "loss" in your lives. I wanted to take a few minutes as your shepherd to reassure you that I believe this loss will be a tremendous source of grace and strength for you during these next few weeks. It is no accident that we are being asked to make this Eucharistic Sacrifice during Lent. We are being asked to go into the desert, in a sense, where we will be "parched" and will long for Christ's Body and Blood in a way that we perhaps have not felt before. How good God is to allow this time of grace.

In my prayer this morning, I was thinking of different times in my life when I have witnessed people longing for and thirsting for Christ. When I was studying abroad one summer, I met a priest who would celebrate Mass in the various communities of his parish. He would offer 13 Masses each Sunday. Can you imagine me traveling to 13 different towns in Maryland every Sunday to bring the Eucharist to people who would not otherwise receive it? One Sunday while I was with him, he shared that he would be adding another Mass to the Sunday schedule. He said "I actually will now have 14 Masses each Sunday because there is a group who usually attends one of the scheduled Masses, but because of gang activity in their community they are too afraid to come out." So, we went into the gang area, not the safest, and celebrated the Most Holy Sacrifice for the people. It was a tremendous gift. People were so joyful Christ had come to them.

Last year on Mission Sunday, Fr. John Wandera from the Archdiocese of Tororo visited the parish. I will never forget how he said that he would go from community to community offering Mass each Sunday - but that the communities were so far away from each other, he could only get to them twice a year. In his province the people are only able to receive the Eucharist when the priest comes after he has heard hours of confessions. Those kind of experiences remind me to remind you that the Eucharist is a gift. No one is entitled to it. We must all receive Christ like Mary - FIAT.

And, as you know, I give retreats every year for the Sisters of Mary in various parts of the world - Honduras, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, etc. The Sisters minister to poor children, offering a safe haven, nutrition, an education, but above all, a spiritual foundation. Quite often, they struggle to find priests to celebrate Mass for them and to offer the Sacraments. The Sisters can often partake in a Communion service, but not always. So, for the period of time that they go without Mass or Reconciliation, they feel a "loss"- they are parched.

Why do I say all this? Over the years, I have watched our parish grow tremendously in love with the Eucharist. Our Lenten daily Masses now attract 60-70 people per Mass which is close to 200 people per day receiving the Body of Christ. Two hundred people per day carrying Christ with them into their homes and workplaces. And our Sunday Mass attendance grows steadily every year. This is a great grace and a blessing for our parish. It is a privilege for me, as your shepherd, to witness this steadfast,

genuine love. I pray that when we can gather again as a community, we will offer the sacrifice with voices lifted and a deeper reverence for Christ in the Eucharist.

Now God is asking us to go without this great blessing, at least for the next two weeks. Can I somehow figure out how to offer Holy Communion to those daily or often who are not in danger of death? And I have to tell you, as your pastor, that I believe God is giving us a gift by asking us to make this sacrifice. Our Good Friday experience is beginning a month early. God has closed our schools, ceased our extracurricular activities, taken away our long commutes (for some) and asked us just to "be." He has removed many distractions - silenced much of the busy-ness - and asked us to walk with him in the desert - to unite our "loss" with the same loss many of our brothers and sisters experience all over the world. As Christ says in the Garden, "Can you not watch but one hour?..." - I believe now he is saying "Can you not partake of this Eucharistic sacrifice but two weeks? ..." (PRAY GOD - NO LONGER THAN THAT!!)

I believe at the end of this period of dryness, of emptiness, of sadness, there will be great joy; there will be great longing; there will be a people truly thirsting for the water that only Christ can provide - that living water that is the source and summit of our Catholic faith. And that is when we will all gather together in our Church, as a parish family, for that 3-hour Mass! (You know we're going to have a lot of catching up to do. I am already planning my homily - YEAH BABY!!)

In all seriousness, I pray that your Lenten journey is greatly enriched by this unexpected, unprecedented reality, and that you truly grow in gratitude for the gift of our faith. May this time be a great blessing for you and your families.

Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, pray for us.

Fr. Dan