

A Message To Parishioners

April 2, 2020

Dear Parishioners, The Events of these past several weeks have given us all pause to reflect and contemplate our present situation. My thoughts have occasionally gone back to the flu epidemic of 1918, another pandemic with devastating results at the time. There was a recent article in the Providence Journal recalling that epidemic in light of recent developments, which brought to mind a memory from the past.

When I was in high school, soon after studying about the 1918 epidemic in History class, I recall visiting the cemetery with my grandmother and going to her mother's grave. It was a hand-carved stone, written in Italian (they had come to this country from Calabria in southern Italy at the turn of the 20th century). Merely her name and the dates of her birth and death were carved into it. The year 1918 immediately caught my attention. I noticed that all the adjacent graves were of people who had died within days of one another in the fall of 1918. I realized that this was the result of the Spanish flu - a recording of history in stone. I never thought that history would repeat itself in my own lifetime.

I recall my grandmother often talking about those times and how difficult life was. She was only 14 years old when her mother died, leaving my great-grandfather with six children. My grandmother, being the oldest, left school and assisted him in raising her siblings, the youngest of whom was less than two years old. I think of how difficult it must have been to do so with limited resources, lack of the technology and means of communication and medical advancements we enjoy today. My great-grandfather, unable to read and write or to speak English, made a sustainable living as a laborer, and with the support of neighbors and extended family was able to raise his children and keep his family together.

Times are different now. We have more comforts available to us and we can remain connected through technology and social media, as well as sources of entertainment and distractions to "fill our time". Please join me in being grateful for all of these things and in thanking God for all we do have.

Although times are different, they are still difficult. It has been an adjustment for all of us and continues to be so. This crisis, as difficult as it is, can become an opportunity for us to better appreciate the people in our lives and life itself.

We will come forth from these events different perhaps, as individuals, communities, a nation, and a world, not knowing where it will ultimately lead us.

What I do know for sure is that our God is with us, always encouraging us "Do not be afraid" - the most recorded words of scripture and of Jesus himself. I know that it was my great-grandfather's faith in the Lord Jesus and our Lady, under the title of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, that sustained him and his family throughout their lives- the same faith that was handed on to my parents and to us. That faith which continues to sustain us during these difficult days.

It is the struggles we endure in life, as well as life's joys and triumphs, that make us who we are. They help to develop our character and become part of the fabric of our lives. This struggle can become a catalyst of growth and opportunity for us, as difficult as it may seem to grasp that notion. What can we learn from it? In what ways will we be different? How can I grow as a person from here? What are the lessons for me? Each of us has to answer these questions for ourselves.

In this week's RI Catholic, dated March 26, 2020, there is a good editorial, "Faith, Leisure and COVID-19", written by Dan McQuillan of the Humanities Department at Portsmouth Abbey School. I would encourage you to read it if you can. He says:

"With all this leisure time, it would do our anxious hearts good to open ourselves contemplatively to Christ. Let this be very clear: God did not cause this natural evil, but He can bring about a greater good from it. Salvation history has seen pestilence and plagues. Now is no different. May those of us at home, with time on our hands be abundantly blessed by Christ during this pandemic."

God Bless You! Stay healthy and be safe! Father Joe