

An Important Message to the Parish of St. Patrick Cathedral

Dear faithful people of God in St. Patrick's Cathedral,

I just wanted to write to you something a little more personal than simply a reflection on the Sunday readings in light of the growing anxiety and fear that the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) is producing among many of us. First, just to encourage you in your life of faith and belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and his victory over sin and evil. That is where we root ourselves as a Christian people. It must be our fundamental orientation and disposition.

These can be scary times, but if we utilize our God-given gifts of prudence, wisdom and reasonability, we can face them with a sense of trust and hope. The Scriptures always remind us: Do not be afraid. We have implemented here at St. Patrick's Cathedral in the context of the celebration of the Eucharist very measured and prudent precautions in light of the flu that can also be helpful in light of COVID-19 (coronavirus disease). We must adhere to them though. It may become necessary that further measures will have to be implemented, and when that comes, those will be announced. This would be in terms of parish gatherings outside of the celebration of the Eucharist. It is important not to be alarmist – and I don't want to be – but one also must exercise the virtue of prudence and wisdom based on what serves the common good of all the people. We are all in this together, and sometimes one's personal piety may have to bend a little bit in the direction of the solidarity that we share as human beings in light of the common good.

This is particularly true in terms of the reception of Holy Communion. Again, I encourage those who are accustomed to receiving Holy Communion "on the tongue" to consider receiving the Body of Christ according to the more ancient practice of "in the hand." This request is made not only for your own welfare, but out of concern for the welfare and health of your neighbor. Though someone may feel fine, one of the characteristics of this disease is its ability to spread without someone even showing many symptoms, and its ability to have catastrophic effects for those who have underlying health issues already, and toward the elderly. There are many here who have weakened immune systems already due to numerous factors, and there are many who are elderly. Again, out of a wise and prudent sense of the common good for both yourself and your fellow brother and sister in Christ, please consider this request made respectfully and from the heart.

Reception by the hand is a venerable, reverent and ancient form of taking the Body of Christ. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, a fourth century father of the church, who was Bishop of Jerusalem, and whose feast day is March 18, wrote the following as part of his instruction to newly baptized Catholic Christians on how to receive Holy Communion. In his

Mystagogical Catechesis 5, St. Cyril writes: “So when you approach do not come with your wrists extended or your fingers parted. Make your left hand a throne for your right, which is about to receive the King, and receive Christ’s body in the hollow of your hand, replying ‘Amen’” (Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogical Catechesis 5, 21). To make one’s hands into a throne to receive our King, the Bread of Heaven...a powerfully reverent and humbling image indeed.

Two forms of prayer I would encourage all of us to do daily is to, at some point, pray and reflect on Psalm 91, the powerful text of which forms the basis of our often sung hymn On Eagle’s Wings, and to start a personal novena to Our Lady, the Undoer (Untier) of Knots. This is Pope Francis’ favorite devotion to Our Blessed Mother. Psalm 91 has powerful imagery of imploring God to save us from the plague or pestilence that prowls around. This current plague has really knotted us human beings up. Our Blessed Mother’s intercession is powerfully needed.

The second reading from today’s mass for the 3rd Sunday of Lent has a powerful line in which we can root ourselves, I think. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans writes, “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). There’s a similar idea in Paul’s first letter to Timothy: “This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). This is the hope in which you and I stand: God’s undying love for us because Christ Jesus died for us in order to save all of us. Let’s hold strongly to our faith, while in wise and prudent service to the common good, we look out and care for one another.