

Thoughts in the Time of COVID-19 #11—April 7, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

The closure of our churches with the impossibility of taking part in Mass or receiving Holy Communion is a great sacrifice for Catholics in this time of the Coronavirus pandemic. We hope that the necessary health restrictions will be lifted shortly and that the fast from the Eucharist being undergone by God's people will soon be over.

I hear it said often that, yes, as we continue our Lenten journey and enter Holy Week, many of us are missing celebrating the Sunday Eucharist together. It is strange and sad.

During this time other bishops and I have encouraged our priests to celebrate Holy Mass daily—even if alone—for you, their parishioners, for the whole world, especially for all suffering from COVID-19 and for an end to the pandemic.

Over these days of Lent as Masses are being live-streamed, taped and posted to social media sites, we have seen some creative ideas such as priests printing pictures of parishioners and taping them in place in the pews as a kind of 'reverse virtual presence.'

I have heard both priests and people remark about how odd it is to have a "private Mass" with just the priest or one server present. Because most priests are accustomed to celebrating with a congregation, some have asked themselves: Mass alone? Why? Is it appropriate even?

The truth though is more significant. For when we think about it, we are never truly alone. Yes, it is unusual for priests not to have their parishioners in the pews in front of them. But the Church's teaching foresees this and recognizes in it a spiritual good for the priest and for the people.

Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 wrote about the Church's teaching on the Eucharist in the life of priests in his follow-up exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* (On the Sacrament of Charity):

"Priestly spirituality is intrinsically Eucharistic [...] I recommend to priests 'the daily celebration of Mass, even without the participation of the faithful'. This recommendation corresponds above all to the objectively infinite value of each Eucharistic Celebration; it then draws from it a motive for a particular spiritual effectiveness, because, if it is lived with attention and with faith, the Mass is formative in the deepest sense of the term, insofar as it promotes conformation to Christ and that it strengthens the priest in his vocation."

Pope John Paul says that commitment to daily Mass begins with seminary formations: *"It will therefore be advisable for the seminarians to participate daily in the Eucharistic Celebration, so that, thereafter, they adopt this daily celebration as a rule for their priestly life. They will also be educated to consider the Eucharistic Celebration as the essential moment of their day."*

Truly, the Eucharist is a miracle on more than level. We know as Catholic Christians that Christ is truly present in the consecrated bread and wine, body, blood, soul, and divinity. But whenever

Christ is present, the Head of his Mystical Body, the Church, we are united through him to each other and with him.

In Christ, we are one and so we are never left alone or by ourselves. We are never alone! The continuation of Mass in the crypt of Notre Cathedral Basilica where the priests of my residence gather daily implicitly includes the people of the diocese even though they are not physically present to one another. With the eyes of faith, we know that we are with Christ and with each other.

The Masses that the priests, who are alone, are celebrating in our parishes bring many graces to all—to God’s faithful and to the priests. So, we can truthfully say to one another “We will see each other in the Eucharist.”

Dear friends, I promise that I will “see” you each day of this Holy Week, on Easter Sunday and as long as this lockdown lasts. You are all in my prayers.

God bless you.

✠ Terrence