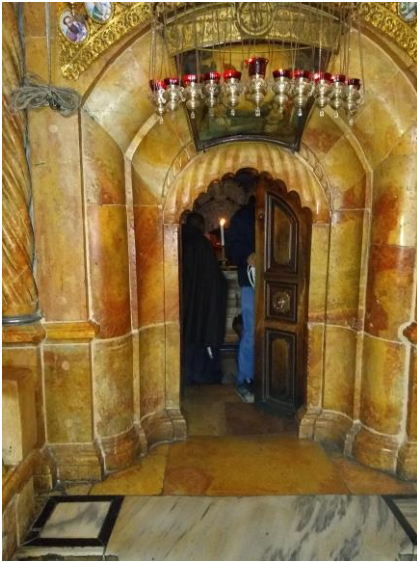


Good Friday, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

First of all, may I wish you and all your loved ones a blessed and holy Easter. These three days, when we mark the passion, death and resurrection of Christ are the very pinnacle of our Christian faith. So, I invite you to join me in prayerful reflection on their meaning and in giving thanks for the gift of salvation and the hope that we have in the Risen Christ.



For Christians the image of Christ as the Light of the World, is a powerful one- so this Easter I am asking all of us here at St. Francis (and indeed all people of good will) to join me in lighting a candle on Holy Saturday evening and to place it in your window as a sign of hope. It's a small gesture but a powerful one! Let's call it the CANDLE of HOPE.

Entrance to the Tomb of Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem.

The events of that first Good Friday are well known to us. But this year they seem to move beyond just a descriptive rendition of that event as we struggle with the virus and truly walk with Christ along the way to Calvary.

As Christians, we have the benefit of knowing the whole story- that the cross ultimately leads not to death but to life- eternal life! And yet, as we are now experiencing, the cross is a part of life that we cannot ignore- indeed it is all too real for so many of us now. But we know that with the cross God shows us the abundance and depth of his love and his desire to bring us to a place of life and hope.

So, our challenge in these days of suffering and uncertainty is to hang on to that love and hope- to dig deep into our faith in Jesus Christ. Last Sunday we found ourselves with the crowd calling out to Jesus as savior to help us- to lead us through the dark days and to shine a light of hope and mercy on our broken and sick world.

Having been educated by Jesuits, I find St Ignatius very helpful as I struggle to make sense of this crisis and to lead our community of faith. St. Ignatius challenges us to dig deep- to place ourselves in the Good Friday scene and to ask how it feels to be there and how God looks upon us as he shows the depth of that crucified love. I suspect there will be a range of emotions- pain, fear, maybe even a little comfort- the comfort that comes from faith and the

ability to be able to serve others even in times of crisis. It will be a mixed response- for love is often untidy and challenging.

Over the past few weeks, I certainly have been moved not just by the pain and fear that abounds but by the generosity and trust of so many. Your many texts, emails and cards have encouraged me no end- your ongoing support of our parish allows us to continue our ministry and to be ready for the day when we can leave our isolated places and enjoy one another's company again. These are such powerful sign of your hope and love.

Yet in the meantime, I know there is much pain out there in the shadow of the cross. I too have felt it and I know you have too- in the grieving families unable to experience the consoling hug of another, in the child isolated from elderly parents, the young adult unable to get back to their homeland, in the many business people who face dire economic prospects, and above all in the caring and yet dangerous work of the medical and emergency services. The shadow of the cross certainly hangs deeply this year.

Yet, there is also much love and care in the shadow of the cross- in the many volunteers coming forward to phone those who live alone, in those who reach out to shop and provide for others, in the care that is being offered to those on the margins- the homeless and the poor in our midst. Each day, as I open our Parish Church, (*yes, it is still open daily from 10am to 2pm*) I am met with groceries for local food banks. All signs of how Christ' love is still inspiring us to love our neighbor.

As of today, we have no idea how long this crisis will continue- but on this Good Friday there are signs of real hope. Here in the shadow of the cross a new humanity might just be emerging- a new understanding of who we are and what we are called to be!

I suspect that our generation will never be the same again. While we cannot decide for future generations, we can decide how we go forward in light of this challenging experience. As a community of faith we at St. Francis parish are being taught again what really matters in this life- the enduring presence of God's love and mercy, the power of generous hearts- the need for faithful fellowship along the journey of life- and the need for hope! That is quite a lesson!

So the words of St. Paul ring our loudly on this Good Friday as he reminds us that in Christ God has not only drawn near to humanity but become one with us- ***“for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”***

Fr. James