

Friday, April 24, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Is it me or are we just living in the craziest of times- not only with the stay at home order and its impact on our lives, but even the weather seems crazy- one day I'm working in the garden preparing for the growing season, and the next day it's snowing! Oh how I am praying for a return to normality- and soon!

Like you, I am in my ever optimistic way, beginning to prepare for the great day when the stay at home order is lifted albeit with a new insight and maybe a few restrictions. I even wrote to the bishop this past week, seeking guidance on how we should be preparing for the return of our community of faith and for First Communion and Confirmation. Now, don't get me wrong- I'm not going against the civil authorities, but simply planning for the inevitable. As I have said before ***"life has changed, it has not ended,"*** and so a little planning ahead is a good thing, even in light of the extension to the stay at home order until May 15.

I have also been giving some thought to what I might do with the stimulus check that the federal government is sending to us- many ideas come to mind, but one that keeps popping up is the need to spend some of it locally and not just simply to squirrel it away for another rainy day. That way, it will do more good and allow local stores and services to get back on their feet all the quicker- after all we are in this together.



And it's that theme of *"togetherness"* that lies at the heart of the request by the US bishops to rededicate our nation to Mary, Mother of the Church. Maybe a better word might be ***"family"***- after all we are not just part of the family of nations or the American family but by baptism, we are part of the family that is the Church. And every family needs a mother- one who exercises a loving, caring and prayer-filled presence among her children. In ***Acts 1:14***, we are told that Mary was present with the disciples in the Upper Room in the days after the resurrection. That motherly presence has never gone away- indeed, throughout the generations, she who is blessed as both mother and disciple, has continued to exercise that maternal role at the heart of the Church and to persevere in prayer for all of God's children. And how we need that prayer at this time of

grave crisis and challenge for our nation and world! We need Mary's intercession more than ever!

So as brothers and sisters in Christ, I am inviting you to join me online this Friday, May 1 (*May is the month traditionally dedicated to Mary*) for a special Mass and Holy Hour, beginning at 9:15am. During the Holy Hour we will crown a statue of the BVM and pray (and sing) Morning Prayer in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, ending with Benediction.

As May 1st is also the feast of St. Joseph, the Worker, this theme of family is even further underlined- for as foster father of Jesus, it was by his side that he learned his carpenter's trade and the essentials of the Jewish faith. Even today, as protector of the Universal Church, Joseph continues to exercise a fatherly presence that reflects the eternal presence of God.

So join us online- as family, we are responsible for one another and prayer is one of the key ways we meet that familial and sacred responsibility. Prayer is not just for the few, but for all of us- young and old- and we need all of us to participate. It's May Day, so a good day to pray also for workers, especially those in our emergency and medical services who put their lives on the line to care for the sick in the midst of this virus crisis

Finally, I chose the picture of the Holy Family within my letter, because it included Jesus' grandparents, Sts. Anne and Joachim. It reminds me that in the mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus became not just part of a large extended family- with grandparents, cousins and aunts and uncles, but also part of a living (and at times struggling) community in his home town of Nazareth. He had neighbors, schoolmates, played ball on the street, ran with the other kids and climbed trees, did his chores, went to the synagogue and joined with others in prayer- all the normal things that every kid did in 1st century Palestine. Family and community are important to God and play an important role in his plan of salvation. Hopefully, when this crisis has passed, one of the lessons that we might take to heart is that importance of family and the need for greater sense of community and mutual responsibility.

So stay safe- remember this too shall pass and very soon we will be able to gather together again to bask in the great mercy of God and to celebrate our identity as part of God's family. Until then blessings to all!

Fr. James