

March 17, 2020
Feast Day of Saint Patrick

Dear Parishioners –

As concerns and anxiety about the continued spread of the COVID-19 virus heighten around us, I wanted to reach out to you in faith and personal solidarity. We are all going through this together. I know this is a scary time and I am scared as well. The unknown can often be frightening to us. This fear is exemplified through many actions we've witnessed in the news or in person, such as the hoarding of supplies, the almost daily sell-offs in the financial markets, and the constant media coverage of the numbers of those infected and whether our government is doing enough to help and to protect us. It all seriously frightens us.

But my dear friends, recall that Jesus often calms the fears of his disciples and he will calm us. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus walks on water and the disciples fear Jesus as a ghost against the backdrop of a stormy sea. *Jesus hastened to reassure them: "Get hold of yourselves! It is I. Do not be afraid!" Peter spoke up and said, "Lord, if it is really you, tell me to come to you across the water." "Come!" he said. So, Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water, moving toward Jesus. But when he perceived how strong the wind was, becoming frightened, he began to sink and cried out, "Lord save me!" Jesus at once stretched out his hand and caught him. (Mt 14: 27-31)*

The Lord reassures us not to be afraid and stretches out his hand and holds us up as well. I know it is a challenge for us in these difficult times to believe this, especially as something as reassuring and comforting to us as the Eucharistic presence through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is denied to us. But it is for our safety and the safety of our loved ones and all of God's people. Our Lord is always with us, his presence and his great love surrounds us; reassures us - even if we cannot receive him physically through Holy Communion or another sacrament.

I have told some people that I am treating these difficult days as a long Good Friday of Lent and to offer up in sacrifice and our desire for Holy Communion for those suffering from this virus around the world, those quarantined, and for those who cannot readily receive the Eucharist so easily as we have before this all started. These sacrifices may not be what we had planned for during our Lent (certainly it is not the Lent I started out with), but these are the crosses and the Lenten journey that has been given to us by circumstances and perhaps by the Lord himself. To help us grow fonder of him and create a greater desire in our hearts and lives to attend Mass and receive his presence in the Eucharist. Let us embrace these crosses together and come out at the end of all this better Christians and better people.

Please be aware that in the coming weeks the church building will remain open and accessible 24 hours a day by means of the ramped/handicapped door for those who wish to come and pray. We will also be posting on the parish website easy links to various religious and spiritual sites such as the Archdiocese of Washington as they have many resources available already with ideas and ways to pray as a family, experience spiritual communion, and watch live-

streamed Sunday and daily Masses. In the near future, our website will also have available a link to access *Magnificat* Magazine (a daily prayer missal). The publisher of *Magnificat* Magazine has made its App available free of charge to anyone wishing spiritual enrichment while we all endure these days of suffering, sacrifice, prayer, and greater reliance upon the Lord's love.

While public Masses have been suspended and a dispensation of the obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been granted by Archbishop Wilton Gregory to all the faithful of Washington, please know that you, your loved ones, and the intentions of each day will be remembered by me in a private Mass in our rectory chapel. I have offered the Mass in this way since the Archbishop decreed the cessation of all public Masses. As a spiritual practice if you wish, please know that my private Mass will be offered on weekdays at approximately 4.30 pm and at 11 am on Sundays. Perhaps at those times of day, you can gather the family around the dining room table or the living room and offer your prayers, read the Mass readings of the day, offer a rosary using the Sorrowful Mysteries, make a spiritual communion, or walk through the Stations of the Cross for your soul and all the souls of our world. In this way, we are all still united around the altar of the Lord and together in prayer.

On a practical note - please be aware that I have hired an outside cleaning company that specializes in deep cleaning. They will clean the church and restrooms regularly for your safety since I am leaving the church open 24 hours a day. Be mindful to keep a *safe social distance* from others who might be present in the church praying. Limit your number in the church to no more than 25 people if necessary. Stay home and do not come to the church if you are feeling unwell in anyway. Use hand sanitizer, wash your hands regularly, and use common sense to stay healthy and keep others from getting sick. Be calm and prudent about the times we are living and we will all be fine.

The cleaning company will also deep clean the school, school administration building, the church hall and rectory office. Once these buildings are thoroughly cleaned, they will be locked and entry will be prohibited (with the exception of the rectory offices which are currently operating under reduced hours) until school classes and public Masses resume.

Please know as well that Fr. John Enzler and I are safe and healthy in the rectory. Thank you to all who have reached out to us by phone and email to check on us. We appreciate your concern and love.

This crisis seems that it will last longer than first anticipated as many institutions have closed. Soon we will be joined by two seminarian lodgers in the rectory as the various seminaries and universities have closed in order to contain the spread of the virus. Transitional Deacon James Glasgow, who served with us last summer, returned from his school in Rome and after a two-week quarantine, he will again live at the rectory. He will be with us from now until his ordination to the priesthood in June 2020. Deacon James will be finishing his classes for this academic year online.

In addition, Chukwuma Odigwe, a first year Pre-Theology student at the Archdiocese of Washington's Saint John Paul II Seminary, will also be assigned to us. Chukwuma attends classes at The Catholic University of America in Washington and while his seminary and university are closed, he too will be finishing his academic year online from our rectory. Chukwuma will remain with us through the summer months.

Let us all pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten our hearts and calm our fears with the love of Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ, our Lord, who calms all our fears,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Mark".

Father Mark D. Knestout