

*“Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified.
He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.”
(Matthew 28:5-6)*

During any other year, we would be greeting each other at church and welcoming all our visitors from far and near. Children (and maybe some adults) would be out hunting for Easter eggs. We would be joining with friends and family to share a festive meal and to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. This, however, is a very different year and, for most of us, a very different way of experiencing Easter.

I am drawn to the reading from Matthew that describes Mary’s reaction when the body of Jesus was not found in the tomb. She was frightened – frightened that her sense of normalcy had been shaken. We find ourselves in this kind of situation. Our sense of normalcy has been drastically altered and many of us, like Mary of Magdala, are frightened.

For we followers of Jesus Christ, Lent is the time that we enter into Christ’s suffering in our own lives. This year, that suffering is even more real due to the pandemic crisis. At the time of this writing, over 1.8 million people are infected with the coronavirus and over 100,000 lives have been lost and this number will continue to grow. In the United States, there are over 500,000 people confirmed to have the virus and more than 20,000 deaths. In New York alone, over 170,000 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed and have led to almost 8,000 deaths. Millions of people have suddenly lost their jobs. This Lenten season has witnessed a profound sense of suffering in our world.

The Holy Week liturgies remind us that suffering is real. During this week of Jesus’ life, he went from being greeted by cheering crowds as he entered Jerusalem, to being betrayed by one he trusted and, consequently, unjustly tried and condemned, to dying on a cross. But that was far from the end. It was the beginning. Lent – the time of suffering that leads to death... which ultimately leads to the glory of the resurrection.

As followers of Christ, we cannot believe in the Resurrection without also accepting the reality of the suffering. After his death, the lives of Christ’s followers were drastically changed and they, in fact, lived a “new normal”. As described in Acts 4:32-37, they collected their possessions, gathered together, and created a communal life based upon prayer and the breaking of the bread. They cared for each other.

We, during our own time of a new normal, are, in a very similar way, caring for each other. During this time of sadness and suffering, we, like the apostles, understand the sense of solidarity. We are all careful not to get too close to others and to wear face masks to protect them. Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers are putting in endless hours to care for the sick. Neighbors are checking on each other, providing assistance whenever they can. Here at the parish, I received a letter from someone who attends daily Mass but is not a parishioner at St. Pius. In her letter, she enclosed a check for the parish, asking us to use the money to continue the mission of Christ. Last week, another parishioner noticed that we were cutting leaves from the trees around the church. When we explained that we were using the leaves and cuttings to decorate the church for the Easter Masses, he, himself, made sure that there are Easter lilies in the sanctuary for Easter.

For our part, Fr. Juvy, Fr. Carlos, and I pray for you every day at Mass. We have taken the Blessed Sacrament to neighborhoods to bless families during this time that they cannot receive the communion themselves, always careful to keep at least six feet of distance between each other. We will continue to do this during the Easter season. We also devised a plan to continue to celebrate and record the Sunday Masses, special devotions, including the Stations of the Cross and the Devine Mercy Novena, and Triduum liturgies so that we could share these important days in spiritual communion with each other and with our Lord. Our intention is to keep the liturgies as familiar as possible in order to provide you and your families an opportunity to celebrate Mass in as normal a manner as is possible.

We are grateful for the donations that continue to be offered to support the work of our church. As you know, the parish relies solely on your generosity in order to continue to mission of the Church. I am counting on you stepping forward to the best of your ability so that we may continue the vitally important work of our parish and our Church.

Just as God was good and faithful to the people of Israel when he led them from slavery into the Promised Land, (Exodus 14:15-15:1), I firmly believe that through him, with him, and in him, there will be many blessed days ahead of us – for individuals, families, communities, our nation, and the world. This Easter, we must secure the undying hope that Jesus Christ offered us through his death and resurrection. The Easter fire cannot be dimmed.

*Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead,
and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.'
(Matthew 28:7)*

Therefore, receive the Paschal Mysteries of Jesus Christ in your heart, soul, and mind. Then, like Mary Magdalen, go to your spouse, your children, your brothers and sisters, your parents (*even your in-laws*), and your neighbors, and through your words and deeds, announce to them the Good News of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray for the grace of patience, compassion, courage, wisdom, peace, harmony, health, generosity, compassion, and unity.

Yes, this Easter season is very different than those we have experience before, but it is as sacred and blessed as it has ever been. And so, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I greet you in the ancient tradition, as the first Christian communities would greet each other, “Χριστός ἀνέστη!” - “Christos Anesti!” (“Christ is risen!”) and I know that your response will be “Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη!” - “Alithos Anesti!” (“Truly He is Risen!”)

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Fr. Paw Lwin