4th SUNDAY OF LENT

Never did I imagine live-steaming a mass. Nor did I imagine living as we are today. We can identify with the blind man in today’s Gospel. We’re not able to see what lies ahead. Each day brings new challenges. I am afraid. I am anxious. Loneliness embraces me. Each day seems darker. We don’t understand. It seems surreal but unfortunately it’s real. Our worries weigh us down. We’re living in a health pandemic, an emotional pandemic, and a financial pandemic. The loss of so many jobs will leave so many people hungry, on the roadside begging. Like the blind beggar, we desire to see Jesus, we want to see.

We began Lent remembering who we are and who God is, remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. In the desert of our lives, we turned to God again. Lent is a time for fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Lent is a time to recognize our humanity, our brokenness, our neediness. In this holy time, we remember that we hunger and thirst for God and for who God is, love.

This Lent has made our hunger very real. We say in our mission here at St. Mary’s Student Parish that we are Christ-centered with the Eucharist as the source of our holiness. I love Sundays! Gathering with all of you in prayer, to hear God’s word and to receive the body and blood of Christ, food for our journey, coming to be strengthened by Jesus and by each other as we walk with Christ and one another. I miss you. I realized how much I love you, care for you, and how much you inspire me, we inspire one another with the celebration of the Eucharist, our source of holiness. Our fasting is not simply the abstinence of meat on Fridays, but the hunger we feel to be together again and nourished at the Eucharist. Thank God for the gift of the Eucharist and the gift of St. Mary’s! In or hunger, in our Lenten fasting, in our desire to see, let us be grateful for our faith, the Eucharist, and one another.

I had two funerals in the past few weeks. The first was the funeral of a friend in Chicago that was attended by about 1,000 people. The second one was here last Wednesday for a long-time parishioner with 16 people, his immediate family. How life has quickly and dramatically changed. I was honored to pray with these families. Both men were incredible people, had amazing careers. Both had very successful lives. What moved me with both men, Paul and Len, is that they had their priorities right. Their vocation in life was much more important than their illustrious careers. In their dying, what most concerned them were their families. Both wanted to die at home surrounded by what mattered most, their faith and their loved ones. Both lived life as children of the light, Christ-like, loving, giving to others, serving others, sacrificing for others. They lived their lives as givers, as lovers, giving alms to others.

Lent and this time calls us to almsgiving, to remember our mission in life is to bring more love and life into the world like Christ. I am talking to my father more often. My siblings and nieces and nephews are non-stop texting these days, sending pictures, prayers, making our love for one another explicit, not taking it for granted. They ordered dad an iPad so he can be part of the chat. How are we called to give to others these days? How are we called to love during this pandemic? What more can I do or give to bring more love and life into the world in these days?

Times like this bring us to our knees. Lent is a time for prayer, and certainly this lent is calling us to deeper prayer. As we spend lots of time with family, lots of time in love, let us open our eyes and hearts and see who needs our prayers and our love? I find myself praying for all those who lost their jobs. How will they provide for their children? I find myself thinking of parishioners who are vulnerable and afraid, those we know who live alone, can’t go anywhere, and can’t be visited. I pray for so many of you. I wonder how Coralyn and Pat McIntee are doing. I pray for Mary Bailey, I worry about Les and Mary Ellen. I pray for good old Angela with her 98 years. I worry about George Lowry and all his mates at Hillside Terrace. I am praying for a long-time donor and alum, John Jenks in
Kansas City. The list goes on and on. I find myself praying for doctors, nurses, all who work in health care. So many of you are parishioners. God protect you and thank you for living your vocation in a dangerous situation. Who needs our prayers and our love? Jesus be with them, hold them, be light for them.

So many of you have reached out to me these past few weeks. Thank you. A parishioner reached out and sent me this prayer the other day. It’s entitled Prayer for a Pandemic. The author’s name is Cameron Bellm. She has a PhD in Russian Literature, but has moved from the academic world to what she calls the contemplative world, and she is deeply rooted in Ignatian spirituality. She has two young children. In the Ignatian tradition, she sees God working in the world, in this darkness, God is also present. This is her prayer:

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.
May we who have no risk factors, remember those most vulnerable.
May we who have the luxury of working from home, remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.
May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close, remember those who have no options.
May we who have to cancel our trips, remember those who have no place to go.
May we who are losing our margin money in the fall of the economic market, remember those who have no margin at all.
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home, remember those who have no home.
As fear grips our country, let us choose love.
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors. Amen.

In our fasting, in our hunger and thirst, let’s continue to see Christ present.
In these dark days, let us continue to walk as children of light, walking with Jesus and like Jesus, loving one another, embracing our vocation of bringing more love and life into the world.

Let’s continue to pray with one another and continue to sing our psalm, The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want. He guides me in right paths. Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil, for you are at my side, with your rod and your staff that give me courage.