

5th Sunday of Lent “Hope in Surreal Times”

Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, I thought this was going to be the first Sunday mass I would be celebrating alone in the church. I am grateful for the governor for granting us the ability to have up to seven people to assist me in the church at any given time when I am live-streaming. And as an aside, if any of you who are healthy, under 60, not in the “at risk” group and would like to assist at one of these masses in person just email me with a preferred day of the week you would like to join me. These are really surreal times without question.

As you know, parish ministry is not considered an essential business these days. Out of curiosity, I decided to read the 14 page document that lists essential businesses. Most of it made good sense, however, did you know that stores that sell marijuana are considered an essential business in the State of Washington? I don’t know about you but that gave me a good laugh. And it actually got me thinking, if we got a license to sell marijuana out of our parish office, maybe we could keep the church open through all of this. We could call that new business, “Holy Smoke”. What do you think? Now, of course, I am just joking, just a joke, don’t write letters. It is of course a horrible idea. However, I mention it though because it gives us an opportunity to reflect a bit on what our culture values as essential. Without question though, our parish as well as the Archdiocese is “on board” and completely understands what the governor is ordering us to do. Social distancing is very, very important right now, especially for those who are considered “at risk”. This virus is no joke. Having said that, having faith right now in our lives is very, very essential. Faith right now is essential. Even if we can’t gather physically, we need to continue gathering spiritually. We need God in our lives, now more than ever.

Here we are in the 5th Sunday of Lent and the readings are very hopeful, thank goodness. Ezekiel tells us, “Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them!” In our Gospel reading Jesus resuscitates Lazarus from the grave. As we make our way to Holy Week, we are reminded that Jesus has power over death itself.

And, the Gospel reading is filled with a number of interesting characters. If we were to enter into a spiritual meditation with this profound reading at some point this week, we could ask ourselves, which character in the story do we most identify with? Are we like Martha in this reading, meeting Jesus outside at the outset and speaking her mind? Are we like Mary, who is a bit “socially distant” with Jesus at first before Martha is able to convince her to come outside? Are we like Thomas, convinced that we are all going to die? Are we more like the other disciples who seem to be just going along for the ride? Are we Lazarus in this story, feeling dead inside, feeling bound hand and foot, helpless? Who are we in this story? No matter who we identify with most, we are all called to remember that Jesus weeps for us whenever we feel dead inside. He loves us and will always be there for us. He has power over the grave itself.

My friends, we are living in strange times and all of us are carrying anxiety and some measure of grief by how much our lives have been altered in the last couple weeks. There is also some measure of fear with regard to concerns we have about keeping family safe, concerns about our employment situation, and concern about how long this is all going to go on. I think many of us already know someone who is sick with Covid or who has even passed away. These are hard times. Now more than ever we need to keep Jesus close to us in our daily lives. In fact, as we get closer to Holy Week, we have a profound opportunity to journey with Jesus in a way we never have before and discover who we are in the story of our salvation this year.

And so, with the governor's order of "Stay Home and Stay Healthy", which we all agree with, I think it is missing one thing which is "Stay Holy". Stay Home, Stay Healthy, and Stay Holy. We need to remember to love our family members and our neighbors in all of this. And we need to carve out prayer time each day during our isolation. In fact, I am hearing about families dedicating a room in the house where family members can go in one at a time, just to have some alone time with the Lord, to read scripture, to pray, to cry if need be or maybe just to breathe.

My friends, as we "Stay Home and Stay Healthy" as disciples we are also challenged to "Stay Holy". At any time during this we start feeling spiritually dead and helpless, like Lazarus, let's keep Jesus very, very close to us. Like St. Paul reassures us in our second reading, "If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness." And so, may God bless you in the days to come and all who continue to love the Lord with simplicity of heart!