Dear Parishioners,

How our world has changed in just a month or more! The U.S. had a record-breaking economy with the stock market soaring to incredible heights and the unemployment was very low. We, too, were looking forward to spring, our children and grandchildren were still in school and March Madness was about to begin and most importantly, so was the opening of baseball season.

 All that changed when a tiny, tiny critter entered our world and has brought us to our knees. Unfortunately, many people continue to get ill and even die. Our once mighty economy is in a tailspin as are our jobs and 401ks. How do we make sense of the situation that we now find ourselves? Perhaps this week will help uncover the answer to this riddle.

 For many of us, we are especial disturbed that we are unable to physically be present to the beautiful liturgies of Holy Week. We will miss gathering for the waving of palms, washing of feet, adoration of the cross, lighting of the new fire and the joy of Easter Sunday. Still, we find ways to continue to connect with these liturgies from within our homes.

*Palm Sunday*

 Last weekend we celebrated Palm Sunday which marks the transition from Lent into Holy Week. We witnessed Jesus entering the royal city of David on a donkey. This is not how a conquering hero is supposed to enter the city. He was expected to enter on a beautiful horse with legions of soldiers marching behind, along with all the treasures captured in battle. Arches or other structures were erected in his memory. However, this is not how this king entered the Holy City. No horse, just a donkey, His disciples followed behind not with swords, but with palm branches. And the monument erected in His memory would come a week later, not an arch, just a cross.

*Humiliation*

 Jesus understood the word humiliation in the final days of His life. As Judas betrayed Jesus, his asking price wasn’t in the millions, but that of a slave- thirty silver pieces. When He was handed over to the Romans, He was given a punishment reserved for slaves. He was beaten and crucified in a slow and torturous way. This was done to highlight not just the pain of dying, but its humiliation. The 1st century Jewish men and women covered themselves completely from head to toe- even in the scorching heat. A man crucified was stripped naked and put on display for all to see.

*Jesus Humbled Himself*

 Whose idea was it that Jesus should die in this way- the Jewish leaders or the Romans? In our second reading, Paul tells us neither one. Although they were responsible for His death, His death on the cross was pre-ordained long before them. Though He was God, He freely chose to leave the heights of the heavens and descend into the depths of human misery and suffering. He accepted the status as a slave, especially as He washed His disciples’ feet which was reserved only for slaves.

 But that didn’t bother Jesus. He wasn’t forced to do it, He willingly lowered Himself throughout His life-in His birth, His ministry and now His death. No one took His life from Him, He freely laid it down. His enemies didn’t have the chance to humble Him, He humbled Himself.

*The New Adam*

 Why did Jesus endure all this? He came to undo the damage caused by our first parents. Their sin was that of disobedience- they knew what God expected of them, but they wanted to be equal to God. They were bitten by the serpent and injected with the deadly venom of pride! The only antidote to this poison was obedience and humility. This week, we remember how Jesus crushes the deadly serpent through love and obedience. He lowered Himself to the dust from which the first Adam was formed and as a result, Jesus is exalted far above any Caesar, king or even some rock diva. And the Good News is that Jesus invites us to share in His glory, but we must walk the road of the cross.

*Finding Hope in the Era of the COVID-19 Era*

 It’s times like this, we need Jesus who calls us to salvation through humble repentance. We can’t do it by ourselves, we need a savior, and Jesus is that Savior! Pope Francis reminded us of this in his recent message, noting that the COVID-19 crisis “exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our project, our habits and priorities.  It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities.”

The Holy Father doesn’t minimize the damage that the virus has done throughout the world. He knows this tiny virus has brought the world to its knees, but he also knows that the victory over this bug is rooted in Jesus.

 As we join with the Church during these Holy Days from our homes, we turn to Jesus to help get through this time of distress and anxiety. We unite our pain to those of Jesus. We are healed through His cross and through the cross, we bring His healing power to others through the love and kindness we offer.

*Financial Times*

 On a very different note, I know that you are wondering about the financial situation of the parish. Needless to say, with no Mass these past few weeks, our ability to raise money and to pay our bills is limited. So, I really want to thank you for sending in your contributions. Your support is greatly appreciated, especial in these critical times.

 What have we done to reduce the financial stress on the parish? First, we have had to lay off non-essential employees in both the school and parish office and have reduced office hours to save money. I remain available to answer the phones and try to answer questions. Secondly, we are partnering with the diocese to seek out a grant from the federal government. This grant would enable to keep our employees on the payroll for the next two months. Should we get this grant, it must be used for to pay our employees and nothing else. This would be a significant help in paying our bills. Please continue to pray and support the parish.

*St. Michael’s School*

 Our parish school remains closed, but our teachers continue teaching either on-line or through pick-up learning packets. I understand the stress placed on both our teachers and parents. I am also concerned about our students and their ability to learn and grow to the fullest of their ability as well as their spiritual development. At this point the bishop has mandated that our teachers will continue to teach as they are doing until the end of the school year.

*Liturgical Notes*

 Mass still cannot be celebrated and until that day comes, I urge you to make holy the Lord’s Day by setting aside a holy hour- watch the Mass on television or on-line, pray the rosary, read the Sunday Scriptures. These are difficult time, but we need to build up our faith, not set it aside. The Church is open throughout the week from 10:00am to 6:00pm for personal prayer. If you would like come and pray, you are most welcomed to do so.

 The distribution of palms is currently on hold. The diocese has told us that we may bless and distribute them once the stay at home order is over. We have them in the cooler waiting to be distributed once we are able.

 Unfortunately, several parishioners have already entered eternal life- **Ron Shubnell, Shirley O’Neil, Ray Simon and Terry Reeves**. Unfortunately, we may not offer the customary Mass of Resurrection. We may still burial our deceased loved ones as long as there are ten people or less at the cemetery. Some families have chosen to use that option with a memorial Mass later. Others have chosen to wait and bury the remains with the Mass once we are able. I will respect the family’s choice because it is a difficult time for both the family and friends. Please remember them in your prayer.

 In regards to the anointing of the sick, especially at the hour of death, we must keep in mind that hospitals and nursing homes have certain restrictions. If called, I may not be able to get in to see the person. This is based solely on health reasons. Also, if called to the home, I need to take care- in the event that I may transmit the virus to the family or the family to likewise do the same. This is a delicate balancing act between the needs of the individual and the needs of the community to stop the spread of this virus but I remain committed to doing what I can.

*Remembering those Infected*

 I don’t have to tell you about how this virus is seriously affecting our families. Perhaps you know family or friends who have been infected. Thank God if they are recuperating and we mourn those who have died. Already one priest from our diocese has been infected, he was hospitalized and is in isolation at home but another priest from New York has died. This virus is serious and even deadly, we need to treat it as such. **Please- don’t put yourself or the ones you love at risk by not following the guidelines of our health department and the CDC**. Our goal is to gather together as a community with as little loss of life as possible. With self-discipline and help from the Lord, we will make it through this time of crisis.

*Calling All Seamstresses*

 The CDC has recommended the wearing of masks when we are out in public. Until these masks can be readily available and affordable, I am asking all the seamstresses of the parish to help make masks of various sizes and the ability to be cleaned. You can drop them off at the parish office and we will make them available to anyone who asks. Please help us if you can.

*News from Rome*

Pope Francis began his livestreamed Holy Week liturgies Sunday saying the suffering Jesus endured along the way to the crucifixion was intended to assure humanity that we are not alone - and that the current COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak is an opportunity to love and serve others, as Jesus did.

“When we have our back to the wall, when we find ourselves at a dead end, with no light and no way of escape, when it seems that God himself is not responding, we should remember that we are not alone,” the pope said in his April 5 homily for Palm Sunday, regarded as the beginning of the Church’s Holy Week.

Pope Francis urged families, many of whom are currently confined to their homes under quarantine restrictions, to stand before the crucifix and ask God, “for the grace to live in order to serve. May we reach out to those who are suffering and those most in need. May we not be concerned about what we lack, but what good we can do for others.”

 Stay well and let’s do all that we can to rid our communities of this virus. Fr. Tom