Preparing

Due to the threats on his life, Jesus no longer walked about in public. He isolated away from the city and went to a more desolate area 12 miles northeast of the city near the desert. He remained there with his disciples until Passover was near. As the days for the Passover approached, people began to make preparations for the high holy days.

Due to the threats of illness and death from the coronavirus, we no longer walk about in public. We are isolated from schools and places of work. But there is no truly safe place. Whether it is 12 miles northeast of the city, or halfway around the world, the threat of contracting the virus is of grave concern to everyone. With the holy days of our own Christian faith approaching, we can begin to make our own preparations for Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

What did Jesus do 2000 years ago? He offers us a model for our own preparations. We know that this year will be very different, possibly much more somber than usual. Travel bans remain in effect. Schools are closed. Aside from essential trips to the grocery store, people are not moving around unless they absolutely have to.

Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane while his disciples fell asleep. Perhaps we too can find extra time to pray while others nap. Holy Week is a wonderful opportunity to pray for the needs of others and to think beyond our own immediate circumstances and needs.

Have mercy, Lord, on your Church and on the world. Help us to be attentive to the needs of others especially those who are most vulnerable. Forgive us our sins and help us to be merciful to those who have harmed us. Do not allow those you have redeemed by your Passion and Death to be harmed as they are weighed down with the worries of this passing world.

On Holy Thursday Jesus says, “I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). To love is to sacrifice for others. Amidst the pandemic, we see many loving examples of sacrifice. Those who can go to work, face longer hours and the threat of catching the virus in order to help others. Those who are aware of the elderly who cannot get out, are making sacrifices to help them in any way possible. As Saint Paul reminds us: “In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35)

On Good Friday, we recall how Jesus was arrested, condemned to death and crucified. If we are serious in accepting the new commandment to “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34), then we like Jesus must be willing to take up our cross and carry it. God helps to bring good out of the worst of situations. In whatever form it takes, we can unite our own suffering with the suffering of Jesus on the Cross. We ask God to transform our own hurt and pain in such a way that others may receive spiritual benefit.

During the Good Friday liturgy, the church normally prays a set of 10 solemn intercessions. This Friday we will add a special eleventh prayer for the end of the pandemic:

Almighty and merciful God, Source of all life, health and healing,
Look with compassion on our world, brought low by disease;
Protect us in the midst of the grave challenges that assail us,
Especially those deployed, and in your fatherly providence,
Grant recovery to the stricken, strength to those who care for them,
And success to those working to eradicate this scourge.

With the rising of the sun on Easter Morning, we rejoice in the Rising of the Son of God from the grave. Without the ability to gather as a community, we may feel like the disciples did on that first Easter morning. They were afraid for their own safety. They grieved the loss of a loved one. They were uncertain as to how to proceed. Not knowing when the pandemic will end, our fears and concerns may feel just as burdensome. But our faith tells us to be people of hope no matter how bleak the current day is. For our Easter joy is founded on the promise that all who have been buried with Christ by Baptism into death, may rise again with Him in life eternal.