

Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year A 2019-2020

A Message from Fr. Mark

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Gathering for Mass is our greatest consolation. For Catholics, the Mass is the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price. The Mass attracts us and causes us to gather at the altar like nestlings awaiting nourishment. We are attracted like moths are drawn to lamplight. This is obviously a problem for our public health authorities! We must cooperate with our public officials as they try to find ways to stop the spread of the coronavirus. That is why our bishop has made the statement on Monday: “Earlier today, following the guidance of state and national public health officials, and out of love and concern for God’s people, the Diocese of Stockton made the very difficult decision to suspend all public daily and Sunday Masses until further notice beginning on Wednesday, March 18.” This saddens us, of course, but we have faith that it is God’s will because the Bible teaches us that what the bishops declare on earth is valid with God in heaven. Jesus said to his apostles: *“whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* (Jesus said this to Peter in Matthew 16:19 and to all the apostles in Matthew 18:18). God in his mercy has given us the great solace of always knowing the will of God, even when unusual circumstances arise in every age. Nevertheless, it is sad and painful for Catholics to stay away from Mass, especially those who come to Mass daily to receive the Bread from Heaven.



Instead of coming to Mass, you will have to stay home and pray as a family. Perhaps read the Mass readings for the day. At home, we can pray the rosary as a family. We can pray the Chaplet of Mercy which is similar to the Mass because it is an offering of “the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord” for the sake of the whole world. You can receive our Lord spiritually by praying the spiritual communion prayer (also printed below).

Keep in mind that the priests will continue to say their private Masses every day. Some of these Masses will video recorded and broadcast on the internet for everyone to watch. Although there will not be a gathering of parishioners, we will still offer Masses each day. From the altars of each parish, the Lord Jesus will continually plea on our behalf to our heavenly father. The world could not survive if Masses were discontinued: *“...because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away... since he lives forever to make intercession for them... We have such a high priest... a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up.”* (Hebrews 7:24-25; 8:1-2)

Today’s long Gospel reading about the man born blind (John 9:1-41) is full of allusions to profound mysteries of our Catholic faith. The fact that the man is “born blind” reminds us of our belief in original sin: that we are all born with the need for salvation from God. The fact that he was cured by washing in the Pool of Siloam reminds us of the saving waters of baptism. Siloam was actually a tunnel that brought water to a pool in Jerusalem. This represents Jesus, who himself is the channel that provides “living waters,” as we heard last Sunday in the story of the woman at the well.

Even the strange detail about Jesus spitting on the ground has significance. This represents the Divine being poured out and mixing with creation. "God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." (Genesis 2:7) In today's Gospel, we see Jesus practically breathing life into a bit of Palestinian dust. Jesus spits on the dirt. His divinity mixes with the dust of the earth, creating a life-giving paste. This is then applied to the blind man's eyes and he is healed. All of this makes us think of the Incarnation which is God mixing with his material world and providing salvation. Even scientists would say that our bodies are made up of the same basic elements which form the Earth, the planets and the stars. We do not know all the details of exactly how God created man. Scientists discovered evidence which they say proves the "big bang theory."

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/discovery-bolsters-big-bang-theory-1395083404?tesla=y>

Jesuit priest Father Robert Spitzer sees proof that God exists from the fact that the universe had an absolute beginning (<https://magiscenter.com/>). In any case, we know that God caused humanity to come into existence so that he could then enter creation in the Virgin's womb, live, suffer, die and rise for our salvation.

We congratulate our catechumens who are preparing to be washed in the saving waters of baptism! In those living waters they will be united to Christ and join the Body of Christ which is the Church!

Last in Sunday in the Gospel reading, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that there is no need to be in any particular place to worship God: "*neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem*". (Cf. John 4) Therefore we can worship "*in spirit and in truth*" by praying fervently from our hearts and offer our spiritual sacrifices: "*You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*" (1Peter 2:25) We remain united and built up in Christ while we endure the effects of the efforts to slow the spread of a contagious virus. During this time may God bless all of his with perfect peace and tranquility.

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

My Jesus, I believe that You are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I long for You in my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though You have already come, I embrace You and unite myself entirely to You; never permit me to be separated from You.

Sincerely,
Fr. Mark