Dear Parishioners,

Sunday, April 5 we begin Passiontide with the celebration of Palm Sunday. This is the only liturgy that has two Gospel passages proclaimed. The first Gospel recounts Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The second Gospel is the account of the Lord’s passion.

What has always been amazing for me is that in the first Gospel, Jesus provides instruction for the apostles to obtain a new never been ridden colt with the following words to the owner: “The master has need of them.” These words are sufficient for the owner to allow something very precious and prized possession to be let go.

It would be equivalent of an eighteen-year-old teen having saved up all his money to purchase a new truck and receiving word from an usher that Father has need of it and the truck keys are freely handed over. But to be honest, I actually am 100% certain that any one of my teens if I asked would give me the keys to use. Why and how do I know this?

A little over a week ago as I was making my calls to our elderly, homebound, and parishioners who are our “crown jewels”, it was the most uplifting experiences. Not only was I happy to hear their voices and vice versa, but more importantly, even though I offered the assistance of parishioner volunteers to run errands and the such and the like, they all assured me that they already had family (adult children), other relatives (adult nieces or nephews or grandkids), or friends and neighbors ensuring that they could remain home and safe.

Naturally, this was music to my ears. But what came after touched my heart. They asked me what they could do for me. I told them that their continual prayers and witness of their faith that has gotten them through WWII, the Cold War, Korean and Vietnam Wars, the 1980’s Recession, 9/11, and now this pandemic. One parishioner shared with me that her parents who were children at the time of the 1918 Spanish Flu described to them what the times were like and frankly, what we are experiencing now is less severe.

Another parishioner told me that to hear some say that we are not prepared spiritually is nonsense. The very fact that week in and week out we pray the rosary before Mass, we attend Mass on Sunday, we pray devotions and participate in the sacraments consistently and routinely is what prepares us to persevere in the very spiritual drought that we are undergoing without being able to go to see our family, our friends, our community, and our Church.

This spirit expressed in our “Crown Jewels” of all three parishes seen in their wisdom, in their life experience, and in their faith is what has been passed down to their children and to their children’s children, that is, a character, dedication, work ethic, and persevering faith which looks after each other, helps each other and willingness to step up even if that means giving their car keys to their priest if he is in need of it. As we enter into this Holy Week, may we renew that same spirit of doing what needs to be done because it is the right thing to do and it is what our Lord has asked us to do.
With that said, this year for the first time, I will not be celebrating the Triduum (Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord’s Supper, Good Friday Service of the Veneration of the Cross, and Holy Saturday Easter Vigil) with the Elect and parish community physically present.

Although the faith community will not be physically present, you all will be there spiritually in my thoughts and prayers. However, this will not deter us from what the Lord has asked us to do which is to continue to celebrate this week with great solemnity and sacredness. I am blessed to have the clergy (Bishop Steiner, Fr. Juan Jose, and Fr. Mario) that serve St. Edward, St. Francis of Assisi, and Visitation parishes will gather at St. Francis of Assisi in Roy and will celebrate the Triduum together with me.

As Bishop Steiner reminded us, one of us will have to serve as lector and acolyte for the Mass. Since all of us in our journey to Priestly Ordination received the minor orders of lector and acolyte, I am sure that participating in this liturgical ministry will not be an issue as it will be no different than jumping back on the saddle and riding again.

Of course, there will be some minor adjustments to the liturgy as recommended by Congregation of Divine Worship and Sacraments. To name a few, for the Holy Thursday Mass of the Last Supper, the feet washing is omitted and the procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar Repose is omitted as well. For the Good Friday Service of the Veneration of the Cross, only the presider reverences the cross with kiss while others can make a profound bow.

Finally, for the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, the fire pit and the procession of the Paschal candle is omitted as it begins with the blessing and lighting of the Paschal candle and then the Exultat is recited or sung. The Liturgy of the Word continues as normal and after the Homily, there is no blessing of the water as there are no candidates for Baptism and of course, Confirmation. The Renewal of Baptismal Promises is made and the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins as usual.

The clergy have yet to divy up the liturgical roles yet, but I shared with Bishop Steiner that I am not volunteering to sing because the last time I sang the Exultat, I was a transitional deacon on my pastoral year at St. John the Apostle church in Oregon City. Beth Link, the Music Director, practiced with me for 6 weeks to sing it acapella.

On the night of the Easter Vigil, she gave me a note on the piano and off I went. Needless to say, when Fr. Tim Mockaitis, the pastor, in the darkness of the church went searching for the Missalette to read the notes, as I had gotten off key and created my own original tune to the Exultat, it was truly a memorable moment for me and those in the Church that night. Needless to say, I don’t want a repeat performance and I would prefer to leave that performance on a high note (no pun intended).

(Please note: once the mandate of the church doors to be unlocked is granted and we can gather in community again, the blessed palms will be available to be picked up.)

Have a Blessed Holy Week!
~Fr. Michael
5 April 2020