

With the celebration of Palm Sunday, we are beginning the period that is most sacred in the Christian calendar: The **Holy Week**. In these eight days, we are invited to relive the last days of the earthly life of Jesus. We are invited to live through different emotional states that Jesus went through. These coming days we will hear about:

- Fellowship and loneliness,
- Consolation and pain,
- Death and resurrection.

Just as Jesus went through different physical, emotional, and mental pain, we are facing the same pain as we struggle with COVID-19. Today, over a million cases are reported worldwide, and it will continue to infect more people in the months to come –their health, their finances, and their weary spirits.

This event, next to Sept 11, 2001, may be the most devastating world event of the 21st century and is already being compared to two monumental events of the 20th century: the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic that infected 500 million people around the globe, killing about 50 million, and the October 1929 US stock market crash and the following great depression that reverberated around the world through the 1930s.

The Spanish flu was a three-year epidemic. The great depression lasted a good 10 years through the 1930s. The changes and devastation of COVID-19 is still in its infancy. But these kinds of devastating events don't just impact our wallets and our health. They severely impact our **emotional, mental, and spiritual health**. **And yet the human spirit, aided by the Holy Spirit, continues to strive, to hope, and to love.**

Every time we face death, destruction, despair, and devastation, we call upon the Holy Spirit to renew us, refresh us, and set us on our feet again. Just as faith surged in the past after global changes and difficulties such as the Spanish flu, and the great depression, we live in a time when faith is needed now more than ever.

As we view the world from our television sets, as we oversee a global panorama of death and fear, as people rush the markets for food, as we remain locked inside of our doors for fear of an uncontrollable viral invader over which we have no control, we need to know that God sees our plight and will be there to lift us from it, as He was at the side of Jesus, to provide us peace and comfort through it.

Today is the time for prophets to speak, for Christians to rise up, especially those who can see past the despair of COVID-19 and its effects on health, economy, and spirit, and who can proclaim the Lord's power of healing and love amidst fear and loss. It's the time for Christians to reach out in love to those who are afraid and to provide comfort. It's time for Christians to speak up about God's comfort and gladness, the rock-solid stability that faith can provide in a time of trepidation and an unsure future.

Hope in Despair-2020

Palm Sunday

Never have we had a timelier Lenten season, and never have we been able to look to Easter with more understanding, yearning for God's resurrection power and grace. Christians know the force of that grace, the immensity of God's power to change lives and bring joy out of sorrow. Our discipleship in "real-time" begins today.

Today, it isn't just COVID-19 that we need to worry about, not just our physical health, but the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of the people in our communities and around the world. We are still on the upswing of a devastating attacker, that is trapping us fearfully in our homes and costing us money, jobs, relationships, and a certain future. The longer we remain isolated, the more devastating the effects of the virus will feel. It's normal to feel bad in a bad time.

Despite the resilience of the human spirit, the attempts to create online connections, people will inevitably feel more depressed, more alone, more fearful than they may have felt in their lifetimes. This is the time when people need hope, love, and faith. They need to know that this situation is not endless, though it may last sometime; that this time is not the worst, although it may get still worse than it is now; that their plight is not hopeless, though they may feel sorrowful and without hope at the present time.

We all need reassurance during times of stress and strife, even Christians. This is a time when we not only celebrate our discipleship but recognize our humanness. It's okay to feel afraid. It's ok to feel worried. It's ok to feel sad. It's ok to feel down. Even people of God, people who know God, follow Jesus, feel anchored in their faith, believe in resurrection, need reassurance from God in times of dark valleys. This is one of those times.

In **Ezekiel 37**, God needed first to reassure Ezekiel, to show him a future of resurrection life and hope, so that he could go out and console the people of Israel. Even prophets can become desolate and worried. Even Christians can feel hopeless and anxious in times of desolation and death.

Faith in God can reconstitute us in body and in soul. Our trust in the ongoing course of life can be refreshed and renewed. We will rise up again to be a vast and vibrant people, ready for the battles of the world, confident in our ability to live and flourish. God can revitalize hope, even when it feels like all hope has perished. Only God can resurrect a people from themselves.

My dear parishioners! Rise up now from your own fears, and hopeless valleys. Proclaim the coming of the Lord, and a future of health, happiness, and love. For Resurrection Day is coming.

Just as the story of Jesus does not end with the cross, our struggle against the pandemic will not end in death. As the Father was close to Jesus in his suffering, He is close to our suffering. There is an end to suffering. There is meaning in the human condition and the hope of resurrection in Him.

God Bless you all.