

Dear Holy Family Parishioners:

I miss you. If you don't already know, I'm under self-quarantine due to being exposed to a person with Coronavirus: two weeks of enforced inactivity. It's frustrating not to be among you during these strange and troubling times. But I wanted to let you know that I'm symptom-free and feeling great. I should be (God willing) out of quarantine Sunday afternoon. Many thanks to all of you who have been praying for me and offering to feed me. I would be fifty pounds heavier if I had accepted all your offered meals. I have also been praying for you daily. But while I hope to get out of quarantine soon, the world and Church are dealing with a growing threat. I want to talk to you about that. Think of this as the weekly homily I can't give to you in-person.

In the days since the outbreak of the coronavirus we have become used to the phrase "social distancing." Out of a concern for our health and the health of others we have begun to put distance between ourselves. In these times that is necessary, but it always comes at a cost. We have recently experienced cancelled sports events, the closing of schools, disruptions at work. This week the Governor of Washington has directed the suspension of all large gatherings in western Washington. Out of a desire for the safety of all, Archbishop Etienne has suspended all public masses. This is prudent – but it will hurt.

Do we realize yet what we'll be missing? The Mass is literally communion for us – the opposite of social distancing. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that, "Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body – the Church." (CCC1396). And when we gather together as that Body of Christ, we receive Jesus as Word and especially in the spiritual food of His Body and Blood. "What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ . . . preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism." (CCC 1392) This greatest gift of God's grace in the Eucharist is what we will be missing during these days, however long they last.

But even so, during this strange time Jesus will not be absent from us, the members of His Body, if we call to Him in prayer. To keep our communion strong, Archbishop Etienne is asking all parishes to offer each Sunday the streaming of a live mass celebrated by their Pastors for the parishioners to view. We at Holy Family will be live-streaming mass every Sunday at 9:00. This will allow us to maintain our customs of sanctifying the Lord's day for a

holy hour. We will still receive Jesus' Word through the scriptures of the day and the homily. And even though we will not be able to receive sacramental communion we can make a spiritual communion.

God guarantees His grace in the sacraments, but God's grace is not limited to the sacraments. He can dispense His grace and life wherever He sees fit. Making a spiritual communion for those who, for whatever reasons, cannot receive the Eucharist is an ancient Catholic spiritual practice. While participating in the streamed mass, during communion, all we need to do is unite ourselves spiritually to Christ by telling Him in our hearts of our desire for His grace in the Eucharist. Jesus loves us and knows our circumstances. He is generous with His grace to ones who suffer.

Finally, during these days of the coronavirus let us think of those Catholics throughout the world who suffer so much more than we do. There are faithful Catholics in other countries who go, not weeks, but months, or even years, without the Mass. Jesus can bring blessings even out of afflictions. Let this social distancing from the Real Presence of Jesus, and from one another, in the weeks to come, become an opportunity for us to grow in our appreciation and hunger for what we might have taken for granted – the Mass. When God delivers us from the coronavirus, as He will, let us return to our parish churches and communities with even more fervor and dedication to celebrating together the ultimate gift of the Eucharist.

In Christ,

Fr. Nagel