

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent: Yr. A – 2020

[Ex 17:3-7 • Rom 5:1-2, 5-8 • Jn 4:5-42]

If you have tried to shop and saw empty shelves at the store, been through an airport recently, or watched the news about Coronavirus then it may have left you with feelings of anxiety, fear, or even suspicion of others. Friends, are we going to let our lives be ruled by coronavirus or Christ? For St. Paul wrote in our second reading, *“We boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts.”* Our hope in the power and goodness of God, demonstrated in laying down the life of His Son, Jesus, is what gives us courage during crisis. We will prevail in hope if we do these three steps: **prepare, pray and practice virtue.**

First, **be prepared** as we have been asked to by practicing good hygiene, sanitizing when possible, out of charity for others avoid spreading your germs when you feel sick, and limit your public presence to what is necessary. Also, remember that God is still at work in this world. He is not just a Creator, but also a Sustainer and a Father. God primarily works through secondary causes such as medical staff, vaccines, and yes through our government officials who are charged with shepherding us.

Second, **pray!** This pandemic may be new to us, but it’s not new in the life of the Church. Something far, far worse struck Europe in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century called the “Black Plague.” Without the benefits of our sanitary world and medical breakthroughs they literally buried people in mass graves because 50 million people or 60% of the population died! In the face of such tragedy they turned to God and to the saints to intercede. Specifically, people relied on the powerful intercession of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. Some of these fourteen saints you are familiar with: St. Blase, St. Christopher, St. Giles, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and our own patroness, St. Barbara. St. Barbara was secretly baptized against her father’s wishes. When he found out he dragged her before a judge where she was ordered to be tortured and beheaded. She knew violence and the sacrifice it took to be a Christian and has been a powerful saint to call upon since.

Our prayer at the beginning of Lent was to follow Christ towards the Cross, and the suffering and sickness we are experiencing in our world is doing just that. Therefore, Pope Francis has urged us to pray during this time for those who are ill, for protection for our families, for the medical personnel, for those working on treatments, and for government officials who have to make hard decisions on how to protect us. The Pope went on to say that this is an opportunity to overcome our indifference to human suffering in all its forms from the virus to refugees and the poor. The sin of indifference happens when we are well informed and aware of bad things happening around us, but the news doesn’t reach our hearts.

Third, when the news does reach our hearts, we must **practice virtue.** Virtue is putting our love into action when we see need. If we have a neighbor who is sick this season, communicate your care for them by phone, a card, or over social media. When we are sick and afraid, we feel isolated from others and from God, humans need humans to feel the presence of God. If someone is quarantined in their home offer to drop off groceries or a meal, or take up some responsibility they are unable to do now.

This is also a time that God is raising up saints. Think of the virtue and courage demonstrated by the young St. Aloysius Gonzaga. His father had high hopes of a military career, but kidney disease sidelined him. During his recovery he prayed and reflected on what God wanted from his life. He felt called to the priesthood and began his studies with the Jesuits. Before he finished, a plague broke out in Rome in January 1591. The Jesuits set up a makeshift hospital and sent all their priests and students to serve. Aloysius was squeamish at first, but his fear and disgust at the disease soon gave way to compassion. Aloysius carried the sick who were left to die in the streets on his back to the hospital. He found them a bed, washed, and fed them. Six months later he contracted the plague and died at 23 years old. In his short life, he brought hope to countless souls who were abandoned by others because of fear.

Hope is the virtue that keeps us tied to God now and forever. If we want this hope then **prepare, pray and practice virtue.** For St. Clement of Alexandria said, *“If you do not hope, you will not find what is beyond your hope.”*