

Fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare*) – 22 March 2020

Whenever there is a crisis, it forces us to focus on essentials and what is important in life. This was true when 9/11 took place and it is becoming true now in the midst of the coronavirus. For us as a country, divisions like partisanship, race and ethnic origin, people of faith and non-believers fade away as we come together in concern for one another and the health of our country.

Crises also help us to focus on the meaning of life and our belief in God. Certainly as things fall apart around us, we think about what really matters – family, community and our relationship with God and our Catholic faith. Behind our gospel readings for the third, fourth and fifth Sunday of Lent is the Sacrament of Baptism. These ancient readings accompanied those adults in the early church preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil. These readings can accompany us as we renew our own baptismal commitment during this Season of Lent.

How are we living our Catholic faith? Are we being faithful to the Gospel? Are we growing in our relationship with God and each other by coming to Sunday Mass each week? It could be that we might appreciate Sunday Mass even more, now that it has been temporarily taken away from us. We might have more time now to pray, to read the scriptures, to repair broken relationships, to build up family ties.

Today's Gospel is about the man born blind who has his sight restored by Jesus. He comes from darkness to light. It may feel like we are in a period of darkness these days as we deal with the coronavirus. But our faith tells us that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Panic, by confusing and frightening us, is not coming from God. What is coming from God? St. Ignatius tells us that God's spirit "sirs up courage and strength, consolation, inspiration and tranquility." So we should trust in the calm and hope we feel. This is the voice to listen to. So we shouldn't lose hope.

This fourth Sunday of Lent is also called *Laetare* Sunday or Rejoice Sunday from the opening words of the entrance antiphon for the Mass. This Sunday points us to Easter when we celebrate victory and new life. Let's keep our eyes on the Risen Lord who has already conquered darkness, sin and death! May Mary, mother of God, protect us from all harm! *Fr. Lioi*