Return to me with your whole heart.
Joel 2:12

Lent
40 Days
MISSION STATEMENT
We, the Roman Catholic community of St. Mary ~ St. Paul support the body of Christ through worship, education, prayer, grade school & college ministries.

St Mary ~ St Paul Parish
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Ephesians 5:8
Now you are light in the Lord.

From Father Michael

I would like to take a moment to talk about fortitude. Fortitude is one of the four cardinal virtues. The other three are prudence, temperance and justice. Archbishop Gomez for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles describes fortitude this way. “Fortitude, the moral virtue that strengthens our souls so that we are capable of meeting our fears, overcoming our weariness, and making the sacrifices that must be made for us to carry out our Christian duties in the face of hardships and opposition.”

We are all well aware of the fact that the Christian life is not always easy. Jesus Christ never promised it would be easy to follow him. In fact, just the opposite. He said the path would be narrow, that he was sending us out sheep among wolves. The first Christians took this teaching to heart. In fact they would tell us, “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

Bishop Walkowiak a few years ago told the young people being confirmed that they would need the virtue of fortitude to live out their Christian life in the world. Archbishop Gomez builds on that statement saying, in our daily lives, we need fortitude to stand up for Jesus Christ and the values of his Gospel, to fight for what is true and good in society, to go against the grain of a culture that denies the sanctity and dignity of human life.

It is natural to be afraid when we are threatened with injury or evil, or “lesser” fears like the fear of being embarrassed or humiliated or losing our livelihoods or professional standing for living the Gospel. Fortitude does not take away these fears, but fortitude helps us not to be ruled by fear - not to allow fear to cause us to do something wrong or to prevent us from doing what is right.

Through fortitude we can resist temptations and overcome our fears and we can have the courage to seek God’s will before all else. We exercise fortitude by an act of the will. We may not think we have the strength. And that is absolutely true, we do not. In these days of uncertainty about the coronavirus, we need to consciously make an act of the will in order to exercise the virtue of fortitude.

To practice fortitude means we need humility, knowing that our strength lies in the Lord. Without him we can do nothing. But through his grace, he will empower us with the strength for everything. As with all the virtues, fortitude grows by practice. If we think about it, we will find opportunities every day to make little acts of courage: defending the Church when we hear her being criticized or ridiculed, refusing to engage in gossip, speaking up when we see something that is unethical or not right in our workplace or in our communities.

In this time of uncertainty St Paul spurs us on when he says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Peace,  Fr Michael
Continuing Activities:
-God’s Kitchen – take out only
-St Mary-St Paul worship sites will be open daily for private prayer
-Word On Fire (Wordonfire.org) - Bishop Robert Barron or Fr Steve Grunow will celebrate daily mass and post the video by 8:15am ET.
-EWTN - Daily Mass: 8am, 12pm, 7pm ET. Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet throughout the day (see EWTN schedule).
-Sunday: 8am Mass from Diocese of Gaylord - channel 9&10 10am Mass from Diocese of Grand Rapids - Fox 17

Cancelled Activities:
-St Mary Fish Fry
-Lenten Series at St Paul
-St Michael Penance Service
-ALL Masses
-8:30 - 9pm Reconciliation at St Paul
-9:15pm St Paul Mass and adoration
- All Newman Center events
-Evening Faith Formation
-Student Supper
-Choir Practice
- Stations of the Cross
-St Mary/St Paul Ministry closed

Please remember that offering is still necessary & important even when Masses are cancelled and may be offered via U.S. mail or our online payment service.
March 17, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every year, the season of Lent reconnects us with the deepest thirst of the human heart: to know that God loves us, to know that God is present as we face our trials. When unexpected things happen, they can reveal to us the strength of our faith, or its fragility; the depth of our hope, or its frailty; the vibrancy of our love, or its feebleness. During this season of Lent we are facing an unprecedented trial with the COVID-19 virus. This pandemic calls for extraordinary measures to protect the common good, especially the most vulnerable among us.

I am grateful for those of you who observed my directive to stay home last Sunday and gather as a family for prayer and to watch the Mass via live broadcast. We rely on our faith in times such as these. I understand how difficult it is to not have access to the Eucharist on a Sunday, but we must continue to cooperate with orders issued by government and health care officials. Hopefully, our efforts will slow the spread of this virus so that we can once again gather together as quickly as possible.

Governor Whitmer’s most recent executive order became effective today, March 17; it prohibits all gatherings of more than 50 people in a shared indoor space. Therefore, the Diocese of Grand Rapids has decided to temporarily suspend ALL public Masses and all other liturgical and devotional services, effective immediately, through Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020. With this suspension, all Catholics within the territory of the Diocese of Grand Rapids are granted a dispensation from their obligation of attending Sunday Mass through April 5. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals may continue to be celebrated outside of Mass with no more than 50 people in attendance. Our March 26 evening of penance, “The Light is ON for You” as well as individual confession times may continue as scheduled.

Our Catholic schools remain closed and all parish faith formation classes remain suspended until at least April 5 in accordance with Governor Whitmer’s earlier mandate.

These have been difficult, but necessary decisions to make. The diocesan leadership team has been thoughtful and prudent in providing assistance to me. Science and recent experience have proven that participation in public gatherings significantly increases the risk of spreading this virus. As Catholics we must stand in solidarity with others and work together for the common good. We must recognize the value of every life and work together to protect all life.

During Lent we focus on the penitential practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. This time away from the reception of the Eucharist can help us gain a greater awareness of the importance the Eucharist has in our lives. May our spiritual hunger make us yearn for the time when we will be able to gather around the table of our Lord once again!

You are encouraged to unite yourself with Jesus during this time by making a spiritual Communion. I invite families to use this time to pray together. Let us renew our efforts to turn to the Lord. Spiritual resources can be found on the diocesan website, grdiocese.org. Our churches will remain open so that individuals and families may come for private prayer to experience the Lord’s presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

Our priests will continue to celebrate Mass each day without a congregation. Christ remains present to us in various ways, especially in the Eucharist. Our hope is in God who promises to journey with us. May our love, our care, for one another be a reminder, and a proof, that yes, indeed, God is in our midst!

Let us continue to pray for all who are affected by COVID-19, for our health care officials and medical professionals who are working diligently to protect us during this time.
(Bishop letter continued…)

Let us turn to the calm and reassuring presence of our Blessed Mother during this time of uncertainty:

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe,
Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.
We fly to you today as your beloved children.
We ask you to intercede for us with your Son,
as you did at the wedding in Cana.
Pray for us, loving Mother,
and gain for our nation and world,
and for all our families and loved ones,
the protection of your holy angels,
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.

For those already afflicted,
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.
Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful,
wipe away their tears and help them to trust.

In this time of trial and testing,
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.

We come to you with confidence,
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.
In this time of trial and testing,
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.

We come to you with confidence,
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.

Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,
keep us in the embrace of your arms,
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Prayer of Archbishop Jose Gomez of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids

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