

St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi Parish

**SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF
St. Catherine of Siena, St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata
St. Patrick and St. Theresa of Lisieux**

A Reflection from Fr. Francesco Pirisi, FoH

March 19, 2020

My Brothers and Sisters, let's gather all together in prayer to give thanks to our Heavenly Father for the mystery of our salvation, and for each and every gift that every day we receive from God's goodness.

I believe that you all heard that the Bishop asked us to suspend all Masses, liturgical celebrations and any large gathering until the emergency of the Corona Virus will be passed over.

Surprisingly I feel grateful for this time of challenge ahead of us, as in this difficult time we are called to be stronger in our faith and also in our care for each other, avoiding the possibility of spreading this sickness.

Let's call all together on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may be our strength, that He may lead all of us in this journey.

I pray that a lively and strong faith may enter deeply into our hearts, so to make and keep Jesus Christ present within ourselves.

This is a moment that will be remembered in history because, for what I understand, this is one of the very few exceptional cases when all the Masses have been canceled in a diocese, all of them.

We entrust ourselves into the hands of God, trusting in His mercy, and we'll pray, all of us, that this virus will be overcome as soon as possible, so that we can gather together again, to be in the presence of Christ and to celebrate the

Eucharist, the mystery of our Redemption that is made present for all of us every time we celebrate Mass.

I will continue to celebrate Mass privately and I will offer it for our four communities, but for the next little while, we'll have to learn a different way of being in Christ presence as communities of Faith.

The churches will be open so that all those who would like to come and pray, they will have the chance to sit down and to adore Jesus Christ who is present in the tabernacle. His Sacramental of presence is there. This is where we reserve the Blessed Sacrament at the end of Mass, when there are consecrated hosts leftover.

We are working on a schedule to make this possible with the generous help of our volunteers.

Fr Andrew and I will continue to be present for all those who are in need, celebrating the anointing of the sick for all those who need it, and being available for confessions at the usual times or by appointment.

Possibly the Bishop will ask us to do something different in the future. We will have to wait and be patient. He already mentioned that there will be limitations for celebrating funerals and marriages and possibly also Holy Week; he's thinking about it.

We'll have to adjust. We will have to do the best we can with what is possible.

The Bishop is taking on himself a great responsibility, a great one that I'm sure that is shocking for all of us. It is shocking for me. But I also appreciate what he is doing, because along with the federal and provincial government and the health care authorities, he is very concerned about the possibility of the spreading of the Corona Virus.

I read the Italian newspaper on the internet every day, so I hear what is happening in my country. Unfortunately we were unable to contain the spreading

of this sickness. In the beginning it was just limited in few places and we thought, "That's okay. We'll take care of it. You know, we need to be mindful but there's nothing to be too concerned about. It will pass soon" Unfortunately that wasn't right attitude, and at this point we the news informed us that we have had about 30.000 cases in Italy and new updates come every day. Only two weeks ago there were only 4000 cases. Already over 2500 people died. It is very serious.

The sickness in itself, it is serious, even though is not the worst one that humanity even faced. The biggest problem is that it spreads so quickly and it's so easy to get it, that it becomes unmanageable for the health system to take care of all those who are in need of medical assistance.

In particular this happens because the breathing system is compromised. And to treat it, it requires lots of time, space, personnel and equipment to be available.

The Italian hospitals are not able to take care of all the people who are in need. Health care workers are asked to make very difficult choices about who has to be treated immediately and who has to be left behind.

This is why in Italy we asked everybody to stay home. Masses are suspended; schools are closed; museums, stadiums and all places in public where people can gather together; they're all closed. People can go out only if they have reasons documented on signed papers. People who are just going out to have a walk and just to take a breath of fresh air just because they get tired to be home, they're stopped upon by the police. Some people who were resisting, they have also been arrested.

It is very hard, it is very difficult, but to limit contact as much as possible is the only way to avoid the spreading of this sickness in a way that is totally uncontrolled.

If we don't take responsibility for this danger here in Nova Scotia, God knows what is going to happen.

So I am grateful for those who have the responsibility of our safety, as they are calling on us to do something so extraordinary.

We need to be very, very careful to avoid that the sickness will spread because when that happens, we risk the collapse of our local health system and terrible consequences.

Our hospitals are exceptional. The staff is great. I go there visiting often, so I know how good they are. But the number of beds and of the personnel, along with the availability of equipment, is limited. So we need to be very, very careful.

These are the reasons why I appreciate everything that is happening with the implementation of these precautions, and I'm praying that we can come out of this crisis soon, all of us being safe.

I'm also convinced in my prayer that the Lord is calling us to move some more steps in our faith. I do believe that from this crisis, we'll come out much stronger with a renewed hunger for the Eucharist, a renewed joy in being present at Mass in the presence of Christ. I believe that our friendship with Jesus Christ will become much stronger. I do believe it!

That love is already in all our hearts. I know it! It is in my heart and it is in your heart. We need to grow even more in that love, to be a sign of hope and faith, to be the hands of God's love and mercy on this earth.

As Christians, we can take a huge role in the endeavour of bringing light into the darkness of a world that is beautiful, but that got distracted.

This world, as amazing as it is, is distracted. Instead of looking at God, we are looking in other places that are beautiful, but still, they're not our Lord. They are not our loving Jesus Christ, our Saviour. They're not our loving Father in heaven in whose presence we live.

God Almighty is the One who created us. God Almighty is the One who set us free from the slavery of sin and death. This great love cannot be removed. It's always there. It's always strong.

Now we need to make some more steps for the sake of our Faith for the good of the whole humanity, especially our immediate neighbours, taking responsibility of each other's safety.

Please pray with me, that the Lord may bless all of us. Bless all those who are sick, and bless all those who are dying and who already died because of this sickness, that they may be a sign, a reminder of how little we are, how much we need our God and how much we need each other.

In this time we are like Israel walking in the desert. Israel always trusted in the Lord, even though it complained sometimes. That's ok, we can complain, too. But every time that it was needed, the Lord was there for them, giving the manna, giving the quails, giving water out of the rock. God is and will be here for us. The spring of grace will be always available for all of us, because God's infinite love is for us. This love is our strength to face this difficult situation and to be at service of each other.

Let us take courage and hope for the best for the future.

Please, be prudent and safe in this time of test. I look forward to see you all very soon!

May the Lord bless you and keep you,
Fr Francesco