

Dear Parishioners

As I reflect on this coming Easter Sunday and how different it will be for all of us, I am thinking especially of:

Those who still don't know what they have.

Those who have never seen the unthinkable become reality.

Those who have not experienced the loss of democracy; of losing freedom of speech, freedom to express their opinion, or freedom to move freely throughout their environment.

Those who have not lost a brother, son, grandchild, or other loved one trying to escape a dictatorship.

Those who have never seen a bomb falling in their backyard.

Those who have never had a loved one kidnapped or killed by repressive forces.

Those who have never seen their family, friends or neighbors go hungry.

Those who have not yet learned the inhumanity of violence against parents, teachers, or any vulnerable people in this world.

Those who have never experienced the pain and humiliation of unjust persecution in any form, whether for skin color, nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation or other reason.

Those who have no respect for the lives of others, and who live their own lives irresponsibly.

Those who enjoy their own lives while offending, abusing and discriminating against others.

Those who have grown up without parents, and who have not been taught essential principles and ethical values.

Those who do not understand that life is not a game, but a precious gift to be cherished.

Those who have no heart or sensibility, who are now in a situation in which we must all work together and care about each other.

And this is what we have. We are starting to realize how, in an instant, our lives can change in every way imaginable. We are wearing masks everywhere we go, silence fills the air, our environment is stale, our world is confined and fear takes control. We know this is not the life we expect, we didn't plan for it to be like this, but this is what we have. What will be next? This question will remain with no answer for a while, much as it did for the apostles when Jesus was crucified. What do we get? Where is our hope? What is our destiny? Some day we will get an answer, and it may shake us, surprise us, transform us, question us, and even if it is not the answer we expect, we must remain in hope that life will come back in the same way Jesus came back on Resurrection Day, and he will come back again.

My friends, this is what we have. This is one of those moments when faith gets tested and believers must respond in faith. Churches, libraries, schools, theaters and public buildings have been closed already for several weeks. We were not prepared for this moment in life, but as it ever is with Christ as our Savior, there is hope. When this crisis is over and we are asked what happened with the 2020 coronavirus outbreak, we must say with a broken heart but with hope "I became the domestic church and I helped keep the church open and I did it because that was what I had".

Even the apostles who accompanied Jesus for over three years were not prepared to experience the Resurrection. Jesus appeared at the Resurrection and insisted to them as he does now to us: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). Our faith does not alleviate our fear but offers meaning to it, and reminds us that Jesus is walking with us like he walked with the two disciples to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-25)

I humbly implore you to keep our churches open; no, not the buildings we ordinarily use as our places of worship, but our domestic churches in our homes. Do not be like the disciples and stay inside the house for fear, but, rather, stay inside your house for prudence and solidarity with others, believing that Jesus is appearing in our midst.

We cannot end the traditional season this year as we normally do at St. Columbkille. Many parishioners have returned north and others are waiting for a better time to leave. Whatever your circumstance, we are all without our traditional way of worshiping at Easter. Please know that I am thinking of and praying for each and every one of you during this crisis, and particularly;

I am thinking of those who wait every year for Easter Sunday to express their devotion to the Risen Jesus and who will miss their only chance to worship our living God in our church building. I do hope that they will accept the invitation from Jesus to come to worship, as Jesus proclaimed to Lazarus. (John 11:43).

I am thinking of those who are in nursing homes or assisted living facilities who have to participate in worship by television or online mass.

I am thinking of all medical personnel who are working tirelessly to take care of all the sick and suffering.

I am thinking of all the children who do not comprehend the magnitude of this pandemic, and who are confused and frightened.

I am thinking of those who are experiencing depression, stress, anxiety and loneliness during these trying times.

I am thinking of all our Lay ministers who have been so active in their commitment to bring the Lord to others, and in doing so have risked their well-being.

I am thinking of the staff members who have been furloughed, and how it has affected their lives and livelihood.

My friends in Jesus Christ, the pandemic may not be over, but we know we live in the promise that death will not have the last word. (2Maccabees 7:22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:19). Let us keep praying for each other no matter where we are, that we will see each other again when this pandemic is over.

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face. May the rains fall soft upon your fields, and until we meet again may God hold you in the palm of his hands.

For those who are able to come, remember that I will be present Easter Sunday giving Holy Communion under to Portico of St. Columbkille from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00p.m. All other Sundays

until further notice communion is given from 11:00a.m. to 2:00p.m. at the same location. Do not exit your vehicle, I will come to you. PLEASE DO NOT WALK UP OR COME ON A BICYCLE. And during this time when we cannot gather in our church building, please read your bible and meditate. Pray the rosary. Watch the mass on television or online. And may you be at peace.

Thank you so much for your regular support. And please do not respond to anyone asking for money on my behalf, it is not from me.

You can reach me by calling the office at 239-489-3973 ext. 210, or by email: lgonzalez@stcolumbkille.com.

And as we reflect on the wonder and miracle of Easter, may God greatly bless each of us.

Many Blessings and peace,

Fr. Lorenzo J. Gonzalez