

Dear Friends,

We are now over a week into our Lenten pilgrimage. For all who were able to join Julie for her talks, I hope you were refreshed by her witness and beautiful music. We also had a full day retreat with Padre Jesus on Saturday to begin this holy season. As we attended the Rite of Election with Bishop Muuggenborg last Saturday, he emphasized that Lent is a time of preparation and purification. In his Lenten message, Pope Francis opens with this invitation:

This year the Lord grants us, once again, a favourable time to prepare to celebrate with renewed hearts the great mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the cornerstone of our personal and communal Christian life. We must continually return to this mystery in mind and heart, for it will continue to grow within us in the measure that we are open to its spiritual power and respond with freedom and generosity.

God's power is at work, and in these days, He wants to guide us on our journey to experience healing and reconciliation. On the news, we are hearing about the spread of the coronavirus and by the time this letter is printed, the situation may have progressed here in our area. With a person dying here in WA, there is great concern about its spreading and some people are concerned about what we are doing at the parish. In light of this concern, we are sanitizing the pews each day. In the school, the desks and tables and railings are sanitized regularly. We need to make sure to wash our hands thoroughly as often as needed for our own protection.

For Masses, we will make a few adjustments until further notice. We will not be distributing the Blood of Christ. Some parishes already have a common practice of not distributing the Blood of Christ during cold and flu season. As we receive the Body of Christ in the host, the whole of Jesus is present in the Sacrament, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. During the Our Father, we will not hold hands with our neighbor. At the Sign of Peace, we will not shake hands with our neighbor. As I talked about this with Fr. Basil he responded, "In India we never shake hands. We fold our hands and bow to one another." I think this is a very acceptable way we can still share with one another the Sign of Peace.

With these concerns before us, we have this holy season, this favorable time to turn to the Lord and be cleansed, reconciled to Him. If there is any worry that you are sick, don't hesitate to stay home and get well. Even Pope Francis stayed home at the Vatican instead of going on his annual retreat last week so that he wouldn't spread his cold. Thanks to modern technology, he was able to enjoy the talks from Rome. We, too, can watch the Mass on TV or the internet if needed. We must keep our eyes focused on Christ and the hope that flows from our relationship with Him who entered into our suffering to fill it with His presence. I conclude with one more passage from Pope Francis.

*In this Lent of 2020, I would like to share with every Christian what I wrote to young people in the Apostolic Exhortation **Christus Vivit**: "Keep your eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of Christ crucified, let yourself be saved over and over again. And when you go to confess your sins, believe firmly in His mercy, which frees you of your guilt. Contemplate His blood poured out with such great love and let yourself be cleansed by it. In this way, you can be reborn ever anew" (No. 123). Jesus' Pasch is not a past event; rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit it is ever present, enabling us to see and touch with faith the flesh of Christ in those who suffer.*

In His Most Sacred Heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Jack D. Shrum', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Fr. Jack D. Shrum
Pastor