

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISHES OF



ASSUMPTION
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Your Word, Lord, is a lamp to my feet. (Ps 119:105)

A friend of mine, a Vietnamese refugee and one of the “boat-people” of the 1970s, once told me about his harrowing escape from Vietnam during the time of civil war. Disguised and fleeing from Saigon to the coast, he was told he would meet up with someone who would then lead him through the heavy forest to a secret rendez-vous point on the shore, from which a small boat would shuttle him to a larger vessel, already filled to over-flowing with others hoping to find a better life. During the ordeal, walking through the forest in pitch black and total silence, his only point of reference to show him the way forward was the tip of the guide’s lighted cigarette that bounced and flickered in the midnight darkness. If my friend lost sight of the tiny light, he risked losing the path, he risked capture, imprisonment and possible death. A tiny burning bit of tobacco was his only light on that difficult, but hopeful path.

Sometimes God’s Word seems such a little light in a confused tangle of such darkness it is hard to see the path forward. And yet we know we must proceed with faith and trust. For God does not deceive, even if his ways seem, at times, very obscure.

Throughout these last months, trying to discern the path forward during this time of pandemic has been difficult. Difficult and above all, disruptive. Nothing, it seems, can be done the way it was always done.

We have been shaken out of our comfort zones.

But our faith is also, in these difficult moments, a tiny light, like a flashlight we hold to our feet in a deep forest so that we can see the two steps forward we must take. But only the two steps forward. We know roughly the way ahead, but the path is darkness except for the little circle of light in front of our toes.

Our short-comings become apparent. We are unable to plan as we would like, or at least as we used to. But there is also some good. Families have been spending more time together. We have been forced to re-examine what is really important to us. We have been forced to actually look for hope, instead of assuming it will just come our way.

This is also true in our parish. We can no longer go about things the way we did. First Communions, Confirmations and RCIA had to be postponed. Church groups’ meetings have stopped. Visiting the sick and the homebound is strictly circumscribed. Church attendance is

restricted, and it has to be carefully controlled to ensure the health and safety of everyone. I am very conscious of the fact that if I come into contact with someone with the virus, I will have to close the churches for the period in which I must self-isolate. At this time, there are very few priests to replace other priests: those over 80 are not permitted to celebrate Mass publicly and those over 75 may not distribute communion to the public. In the past, most of the priests who replaced me during absences are over 80 years old now. Here is a reminder, too, that we all have a need to pray for priestly vocations so that our parishes might continue, in the future, to have shepherds that minister the Word and sacrament to the flock.

So what we have done in the past is not possible in many ways in the present. For the moment.

But schools are now open again; we have rescheduled the First Communions, Confirmations and RCIA, but in small batches of families so that the restrictions on mass gatherings are respected; we have had weddings, funerals and baptisms again; we have been working behind the scenes to try to update our out-dated parish list. In March I prepared a letter to send out by mail to everyone, only to discover that it was not possible given the fact that family contact information was woefully out of date.

Slowly, we have tried to see the little light around our feet these past few months, we have tried to discern the two steps forward that we can take, despite the constant disruption and the need to continually adapt and shift our way of accomplishing things. It has not been easy. It has not been particularly fun.

Going forward, it is clear to me that we will have to rely increasingly on volunteers to organize other volunteers. "Normal" will not be returning. The way forward is not the way of the past.

The light is still obscure in many ways, but it is still a light. It is the light of prudent discernment, knowing that we are not in charge, knowing that *we* are not the light. Christ is the light and he sheds his light to our feet, showing the next steps we are to take. But only the next steps.

Thank you for your patience these past six months. Thank you for your prayers and your continued financial support of our parishes. Thank you for calling us to let us know how you are doing and to even tell little stories so that we can laugh and share a moment.

We will be trying to reach out to you over the next few months. You are in my prayers each day.

Fr. Philip Creurer
Pastor