

27 March 2020

Dear Parishioners

Some commentators have drawn a parallel between today's pandemic and that of the great plagues of centuries ago. The Black Plague, or bubonic plague, transmitted to humans by fleas from rats, struck Europe in 1347-48 and wiped out an estimated one-third of Europe's population; it was the worst of many medieval plagues. It returned in 1361 and 1374, and the Great Plague of 1665.

St. Charles Borromeo, archbishop of Milan from 1564-84, took drastic measures during an outbreak of plague in 1576. He closed churches, and he celebrated Mass at major road intersections so people could attend from a distance, just as we, today, have means of television or webcasts so that all might still participate in the Eucharist, even if not receiving.

We know from our catechesis that the Mass is celebrated and completed when the priest, alone, consumes the sacred species, the consecrated wine and bread now become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. The Eucharistic sacrifice is complete because the priest, standing in the place of Christ through his priestly ordination, completes the action which Jesus himself undertook, made present again on the altar, although "sacramentally", under the signs of wine and bread. That is why the priest, using the words of the sacred rite, says the prayer, may "*my* sacrifice and *yours* be pleasing to God the Almighty Father." He is speaking those words not simply as another person gathered in fellowship around the altar or out of an exalted clericalism, but he is speaking those words *in persona Christi*, in the place of Christ. The offering of Christ through the ordained minister is different from that of our own offering as member of Christ's faithful people, and so the words of this prayer, contrasting *mine* and *yours* reflect that theological difference.

The Mass is therefore still of great value, indeed of infinite merit due to Christ's own offering, even if we are unable to receive communion.

St. Charles is the patron saint of seminaries, and he wrote this beautiful and simple prayer:

Almighty God, you have generously made known to human beings the mysteries of your life through Jesus Christ your son, in the Holy Spirit. Enlighten my mind to know these mysteries which your Church treasures and teaches. Move my heart to love them and my will to live in accord with them. Amen.

May you remain in the peace of Christ,

Fr. Philip
Parish Priest