
Fr. Thomas Herge



Parochial Vicar, St. Michael the Archangel

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year A (March 22, 2020)

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Brothers and sisters, the story of Jesus' healing of the man born blind in John's gospel (John 9) is always worth a re-read, despite its length. It is, in many ways, the story of all of us—how we were born in the spiritual blindness of original sin and how we were made whole by the command "GO AND WASH"—that is, be baptized. As a result, we came (bit by bit) to the realization that Jesus was no mere healer, but God the Son in person. This has driven us, like the blind man, to the conclusion that we must *worship* Jesus. But Jesus brings us to this point by no slight of hand—rather, he challenges us, asks us questions, and draws out of us a desire for him.

This is always true, but I think it shines with a clearer light now, when you are all deprived of the joy of worshipping the Blessed Trinity in person in the manner Christ commanded. By means of this deprivation, the Lord Jesus intends to intensify your *desire*.

But first, the beginning of the gospel passage is illuminating for our current situation. The disciples ask "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" We often walk away from this story with just the answer "neither" and give no second thought to it. But the disciples were not asking a stupid question like they were prone to do. They had seen Jesus cure the blind, the deaf, the crippled, and others by telling them that he forgave their sins. They understood that even *Jesus* taught that physical misfortune was often a result of sin. But *this man was born blind*. So what was the cause? Jesus answers, "It is so that the works of God might be made visible through him."

This brings us to an important point: all suffering and misfortune, is, in fact, the result of sin. If Adam had not disobeyed God, there would have been no death, no suffering, no anxiety, no boredom, no blindness, no disease, no violence. But Adam disobeyed God's command, and the entire order of the universe turned against Adam as a result. Nature became to us cold and cruel. The truth is God probably withholds from us most evils nature could throw at us. Nature is fully at his disposal, and he is merciful—willing that we be converted rather than die. God is powerful in turning evil to good.

For this reason, physical misfortune is in no way the unfailing result of sin. God permits it only if some good can be had from it. This we see in Luke 13 when Jesus comments on the death of 18 persons when the Tower of Siloam collapsed (the very place Jesus tells this blind man to wash). He explains that these people were no more sinful than anyone else in Jerusalem, but "but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." God allows these things so that we may repent. Otherwise, we will perish, for we are reminded by such disasters that "the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)."

When it comes to our present misfortune that you are now far from the Presence of Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament, far from the consolation of the Sacraments, we can easily imagine many sins which may have brought about this situation. However, now as always, the only appropriate response is for sinners to repent and the just to

make reparation—nothing new at all. It is more profitable to ask the question “What response is God asking me to make now that we are here? Why has God allowed this to befall me?”

It is a principle of the spiritual life that when a person has made some progress, God will “withdraw” Himself (He doesn’t actually withdraw at all, He just seems to) in order to intensify the soul’s desire for him. This is actually very important, because getting used to spiritual goodies makes us as dull and ungrateful as a bunch of cookies every day. God wants our every Holy Communion to be fervent. He wants our whole selves poured out to Him in the worship of the Holy Mass. If this short absence succeeds in making “our hearts grow fonder”, then God’s will is most wonderfully done, and we are saved from the great evil of receiving Holy Communion without fervor. If, perchance, you are not lacking in fervor, Christ is likely joining you to his deprivations on the Cross, when he said “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” or to his Mother, holding his lifeless body in her arms, all-the-while hoping in the resurrection. What great fruit can be borne from this union!

But what to do in the meantime? Let me just list a few useful points:

- Make sure you have a special time to pray as a family on Sunday. There are fewer obstacles in your way, but inertia may hold you back. Give God his due. Dress up as for Mass. Make an act of contrition. Consider watching a Mass online—but don’t just watch—actually pray. If you can sing, sing. If you can kneel, kneel. Make an act of spiritual communion. Google it, if you need to.
- PRAY THE ROSARY! Certainly include this in your Sunday prayer, but add it to other days, too—you have the time, now, after all. In days of yore, this prayer was called the “Corona” so there is something very fitting for our situation.
- Spend more time together as a family. Eat together. Play together. Pray together. Are you starting to drive each other nuts? Good. That shows that you are not perfect—if you were, the antics of the other person wouldn’t be getting to you. So endure it, try to show love to the other person, and you will be making needed progress. The only way out is through.
- Related to this: don’t isolate yourself emotionally. Talk to friends and family more on the phone. Help your neighbors (especially the elderly) while maintaining appropriate precautions.
- Limit screen time. It is important to stay apprised of the news, and it is no bad thing to enjoy a show or two or catch up on reading some articles. However, you know your habits, and if you know that you will get drawn into fretting, obsessive searching, mindless surfing, or worse, then you need to, especially now, set serious limits for yourself. Go outside, exercise, read, play a board game, pray. If you have extra time, God intends it for your benefit, not to drag you down.
- It is not so easy as usual to get to confession nowadays. When you find you have sinned, especially if it is a mortal sin, IMMEDIATELY make a fervent act of contrition. Don’t have it memorized? Now’s the perfect time to get around to that. Speaking of which...
- Now is the time to form all those habits we want to keep. They say it takes a month for most everyday things. Be deliberate, call on God’s help, the Blessed Mother, and your guardian angel, and see the changes that come. Do this, and you will be big-time rejoicing in the Easter Season.
- Pray the Divine Mercy chaplet for those who will die in this time that they may receive all the graces and helps they need at the moment of death, especially that a priest can get to them.

May you all return from this trial burning with lively faith, hope, and charity. I hope to see, through all of this, a Church come truly alive. In conclusion, Paul’s words to the church in Ephesus make good advice in our days:

Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, **making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil.** Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but **try to understand what is the will of the Lord.** And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but **be filled with the Spirit,** addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, **giving thanks always and for everything** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (Ephesians 5:15-20) **Emphasis mine.**