



Paróquia de
Nossa Senhora da
Assunção

Dear Parishioners

It's been stunning how fast the situation of the world has changed. Even last week, many had not sensed the urgency of the precautions that we all need to take. Public and elected officials at all levels are now calling for everyone to be home except for important reasons, like essential work, food and medicine. At this writing (Friday evening of March 20th) Stanislaus County is reporting five cases of coronavirus infections and San Joaquin County 14 cases with two deaths. The authorities are warning that more cases will happen in the days and weeks ahead. Our offices are now completely closed except for telephone calls and emails by the order of Bishop Myron Cotta. You may still contact us.

This Sunday, March 22nd, we will be streaming two Masses: 9:30 AM in English and 11:15 AM in Portuguese. The link is on our parish website. Bishop Myron Cotta has sent us a number of communications that you can find in our or the Diocese's website. I will respond to requests for individual confessions by appointment, if you call the parish office at 209-634-2222. Our first church has been open for visits to the Blessed Sacrament, but with Governor Gavin Newsom issuing a stronger call for Californians to stay home, I am advising that we pray at home.

With everyone getting on board with social distancing and staying home as much as possible, it is possible that in a few weeks we may see the curbing of new cases begin to stabilize and eventually to come down as it seems to be already happening in South Korea. But we cannot take anything for granted, especially after what we have seen in Italy and other European countries. We have to take every precaution and protect one another.

People of faith have asked themselves: "what is God telling us in all of this?" I have asked that question myself, often. Here I want to share a short reflection.

We are so busy with the passing things of this world that we are even forgetting the opportunities God offers to us during Lent and Holy Week and throughout all the years of our lives. Could God be reminding us that we need to slow down and acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior, turning to Him in a deeper and more serious life of prayer? So many people have abandoned the Sunday Eucharist and those who come are often so distracted in their participation. Could God be depriving us for a time of His Eucharistic Banquet to make us reflect and hunger for Him as the Bread of Life?

Our Lady in Fatima in 1917 asked us to pray the rosary in reparation for the sins of the world and that God was so offended with the lack of faith and ingratitude of so many of His children. The message was clear that without prayer, sacrifices and reparation there could be no peace in the world. Could this virus be an humiliating recognition that after all the scientific, technological and economic progress we are still vulnerable and weak beings that need their God, and that their very life, even just in this world, is still dependent for its very survival in the Higher Power that keep everything in existence? Could this virus be a simple and loving message that our pride and self-reliance will eventually be our down fall in this world and, even more tragically, in the next?

It's difficult to be confined to the home, especially now that schools closed. Teachers in the news websites are offering their expertise to parents and the family to use wisely this time at home. But could God be telling us to live more simply and to appreciate and spend more time with our families? Could God be showing us that a family is a domestic church where the rosary is prayed together, where the word of God is there to quench our thirst for truth and real connection?

Our parish catechists have sent lesson plans to our catechism children, confirmation classes and RCIA candidates to help them with their faith formation. Let parents and their children avail themselves of the tools to grow in faith and appreciate one another more.

This Lenten and Easter season is a difficult time for so many nations and families. It is also an opportunity for a deeper connection with the Suffering and Risen Lord. Let us reconnect with a deeper faith, hope and love. Let us not wander way from the Source of Life. Blessed Lent and Easter!

Fr. Manuel F. Sousa, Pastor