



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 28, 2020

This past week we celebrated the beautiful Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. The gospel text from Luke's infancy narrative reminded us of the saving mystery of the Incarnation. Through the generous, trusting response of Mary of Nazareth, the Divine Word became flesh, taking on our human nature. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, is true God and true man. He is Emmanuel, "God-with-us."

The mystery of the Incarnation is not a singular event. With the Annunciation God enters into human history in an irrevocable way. He eternally embraced our humanity. Through baptism we participate in the Incarnation. Jesus took on our human nature so that we could share in His divine nature. The baptism we have received is also the sacrament we are called to live. Because of our baptism, our life in Christ should radiate in all we say and do. This is fundamental to authentic Christian living. It should be renewed and enlivened during these sacred days of Lent as we draw near to Holy Week and the celebration of the Paschal Triduum.

The alarming and ever mounting outbreak of the Coronavirus has paralyzed the social and economic vitality of the State of California, the Nation, and many parts of the world. Cooperating with efforts to control the outbreak of the virus and protect many of our vulnerable brothers and sisters, the Catholic Church in Sacramento has suspended all of the traditional public customs and rituals of these sacred days. Remember: Lent is not suspended. Holy Week, the Paschal Triduum, and Easter will come. The change in our usual manner of marking the days of the Lord's death and resurrection should stir us to re-examine our heart and seek more intently to follow where the Lord Jesus will lead us in this way of the cross for 2020.

When each of us was baptized, we were immersed into the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This extraordinary grace binds us to the Lord. As St. Paul told us in his letter to the Romans, "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life." The sacramental dynamic of the Lord's death and resurrection is lived out by each of His disciples in the manner that each of us more closely embraces the newness of life found in Jesus.

The current circumstances have shaken us from our usual rhythms. We are unable to gather near to the Eucharistic table of the Lord. Still, through the grace of our baptism we can draw near to Jesus and through him enter into the mystical union of the one Body of Christ. Our sufferings, our sacrifices, offer us the means of entering into communion with Christ. Paul told us in his letter to the Colossians, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church." Let us pray that these words of Paul may find a place in our own hearts.

Growing numbers of our neighbors find themselves infected with the coronavirus. The numbers of those dying from this plague are mounting. Many friends and relatives have lost their jobs. Many of you are staying home because of your children, relatives who need you, and you cannot work. Loneliness and isolation weary and worry an escalating portion of our communities. Each day the future seems cloudier. The courageous perseverance of health care workers, first-responders, grocery store clerks, and others inspire us while their vulnerability in the exercise of their daily duties remind us how vulnerable we have all become.

The baptized are charged to make the Incarnation alive in these circumstances. We are the witnesses of Emmanuel, God-is-with-us. Our personal testimony should make Christ present for others. Pope Benedict taught that no Eucharist is complete without concrete acts of charity. This means that every act of charity offered with faith in the Lord Jesus is intimately connected with the Eucharist for which we so hunger. May that hunger give us a desire to


offer our sacrifices and works of charity so that we may savor its grace in our hearts and through us the Eucharist may reach others.

I am grateful to my brother priests who make themselves available to hear confessions, always observing health precautions while protecting the seal of confession. For those who are unable to approach the sacrament of Penance, remember that you can make a perfect act of contrition with a firm resolve to confess your sins as soon as you are able. This act of perfect contrition does offer God's abundant mercy and the forgiveness of sins. More guidance is available on the diocesan as well as parish websites.

My brother priests, Bishop Weigand and I daily offer Mass for all the People of God in the Diocese of Sacramento. Join with me in praying for God's mercy to end this pandemic, heal all those afflicted, sustain all those who care for the afflicted. May all the deceased receive God's mercy. May all those who mourn be consoled by the Lord's tenderness.

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.
We fly to you today as your beloved children.
We ask you to intercede for us with your Son, as you did at the wedding in Cana.
Pray for us, loving Mother,
and gain for our nation and world,
and for all our families and loved ones,
the protection of your holy angels,
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.
For those already afflicted,
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.
Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful,
wipe away their tears and help them to trust.
In this time of trial and testing,
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.
We come to you with confidence,
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.
Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,
keep us in the embrace of your arms,
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Respectfully,



+Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento