

Homily for Laetare Sunday 2020  
St. Anthony of Padua Church in King George, Virginia  
Father Francis M. de Rosa

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dear parishioners and friends,

I greet you from St Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in King George Virginia as I offer the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass under these most remarkable of conditions.

Our nation, the world and Holy Mother Church herself groan beneath the deadly weight of the COVID-19 pandemic, the so called Coronavirus or Chinese Flu.

It is astonishing and bewildering to consider that just last Sunday this church was filled, with you, the faithful disciples of Christ, for five Masses. While today, were you to approach our doors you would find them locked with a stark notice posted outside stating that all public Masses are cancelled for the indefinite future.

Who could ever have imagined such a rapid and dramatic turn of events?

For my entire priesthood I have exhorted my people to be faithful to the Commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. I have continually encouraged attendance even at daily Mass. And so many of you have heard this exhortation.

With each worthy reception of Holy Communion our souls are augmented in sanctifying grace and our union with the Savior is strengthened. With each worthy reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ we will glow ever brighter in the constellation of the saints in Heaven should we persevere unto salvation.

Often I have asked myself and you, How many Masses are left to us in this life? There comes a day for each of us when our bodies are so weakened that going to church becomes impossible, and we are then able to mark the date our very last Mass.

There are certain souls who have the grace to understand the majesty of the Mass, and they - you, my faithful parishioners and friends - have proven yourselves true to the First and Greatest Commandment to Love God above all things and to the Third Commandment which obliges us to the public worship of Almighty God - at Mass.

You have felt shaken to the depths at this spectacle of being kept away from the Holy Mass and the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

You understand that the gravest development of all is not the threat to our lives due to the pestilence, nor even the restrictions on our civil liberties, nor the plummet of the stock market, nor the global tension with China, nor even the lurking threat of social breakdown and chaos.

No, the most alarming development of all is the fact that all public Masses have been cancelled. You understand that, my friends. It is a testimony to you that right now, despite being scattered about and locked out of the church buildings, you are huddled around your computers seeking to catch even a glimpse of the great and august Sacrifice of the Altar.

We know that life is in fact short, and as Christians we spend that short earthly tenure preparing for admittance into Heaven. And we know that the Mass itself is a foreshadowing, even a taste, of Heaven.

In the face of all the present uncertainty and fear we can still be the most certain and fearless of all men. Do we not live so as to gain everlasting life? Thus the words of St. Paul, “O Death where is Thy Victory, O Death where is thy sting?”

Today, my dear friends, is the Fourth Sunday of Lent. It is called Laetare Sunday, from the Latin for “Rejoice!”

The opening verse of the Mass is this: “Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and come together all you that love her; rejoice with joy, you that have been in sorrow: that you may exult.” Is there cause for rejoicing even now, in the face of all that has transpired?

I think the answer, my friends, is a resounding YES. God Almighty, Whom we have been striving to serve all our lives as members of His Holy Church, has made His Dominion felt throughout the world.

The very nations tremble, yet we are not quite caught unawares! Are we? Think about that. What faithful Catholic, notwithstanding our frailties and weaknesses, ought to be filled with fear? The devil is tempting us to that. He seeks to take away our hope and lead us to despair. But we have cause for rejoicing!

We are members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is the One True Religion.

We are already citizens of the one empire, that of Jesus Christ, which will most certainly be here on that Last and Terrible Day.

My dear parishioners and friends, we must raise up our voices in supplication and pleading to God that we overcome this current crisis, and that we be readmitted to the Holy Mass as soon as possible.

God is merciful and He loves us. He is still here in our churches awaiting us in His glorious tabernacles. You may still come and sit with him in quiet silence. We will be restored to normalcy. There is still too much faith in the world for God not to hear our cries.

Hold strong to the Faith. We will carry out and cooperate in these extreme measures to preserve the public health and to fight this demonic pestilence with fortitude and courage and supreme confidence in the power of Jesus Christ to manifest once again that it is He and no other, Who is the King of Kings and the Lord of History.

May Our Lady, Health of the Sick, pray for us...