

March 27th, 2020

Dear All,

There are a number of things top of mind this week, arranged by topic below.

The Angelus:

Thanks to all who joined us Wednesday by Zoom for the ecumenical Lord's Prayer, and for discussion afterwards about the Annunciation. One of the things I shared was a devotion called the Angelus, a brief, scriptural meditation on the Incarnation, which draws its text from the beginning of the gospels of Luke and John. We've attached a .pdf of the Angelus in the Lion this week, so you can have the copy we looked at Wednesday.

The Livestream:

I'm so grateful that so many have been able to join us via Facebook Live and Zoom these last couple of weeks! I know some still have a hard time accessing the broadcast, but I'm happy to share that Toni has discovered a way to pipe the broadcast directly to our website, so you don't need to deal with Facebook at all. Just go to our normal St. Mark's website, www.stmarksberkeley.org, and go to "livestreamed services" under the "Covid-19" menu heading. Nothing will appear until we go live, so don't worry if you don't see anything right away. Otherwise the same instructions we've been sharing for Facebook still hold, and will take you to the feed.

Gratitude:

Thank you to everyone who continues to give by pledge or plate online! I know it's a worrying, difficult time for everyone, and we're all held a little hostage by the wild swings of the market not to mention the general shut-down of the economy. But as Lisa and I have been repeating lately, we depend on your gifts now more than ever. Because of your generosity, we continue to be able to pay all our staff at normal wages and benefits, and we continue to be able to look after our buildings as far as their routine and necessary maintenance. This is all entirely thanks to you and your generosity. So, thank you -- truly and sincerely.

Help from the YADAS:

I continue to be extremely grateful for Margo, Devon, and the YADAs who have volunteered to help with groceries, errands, technology, or anything else you might need, especially if you're a member of the many "vulnerable populations" to COVID-19. Please, if you find yourself in need of any kind of help or assistance, be in touch with Margo, Toni, or me, and we will put you in touch with one of the YADAs who will be happy to help. I will add, though, if the YADAs are helping you with groceries or other errands, please do not insist on going with them to the store -- the whole point is to keep you safe and out of harm's way as much as possible, and at the very least, to keep a limited number of people in public circulation during this time of "shelter-in-place." Just give them a list, and don't be afraid to be specific about the things you're looking for.

Staying in touch:

While we can't meet at church, we are trying new and different ways to stay in touch. You've already heard about livestreamed services, and parish gatherings by Zoom -- but the much simpler, more "low-tech" solution of reaching out to one another by phone or mail remains one of the best tools we have of staying in touch. Attached to this Lion, and every Lion, is a .pdf of the most up-to-date parish directory we have. Would you please make sure that the entry for yourself is correct, and let us know if you find any other errors? You'll see that some of the photos are outdated, and that we're missing quite a few as well. If you'd like your picture in the directory, please just send Toni a recent photo and we'll make sure to update it. Thank you for attending to this -- it's amazing how useful, and how frequently so, an updated photo directory really is!

And finally, a few thoughts on prayer and Christian life:

Maybe it's just that I'm a priest, and maybe you're free of such things in your life, but I've been noticing an awful lot of articles, editorials, and blog posts lately, all opining this way or that about what Christians ought to make of their churches being closed, and, in particular, about the Sacraments not being available in the customary way. Everyone agrees it's not an ideal arrangement. But I'm troubled by the sheer panic it's inducing in so many otherwise level-headed authors. I've seen suggestions that clergy should consecrate and then carefully package consecrated hosts to be delivered to their parishioners by mail; or that everyone should have bread and wine sitting next to their screens, and that the prayers of consecration will somehow magically zip from the altar through Sonic's fiber-optic network, and pop out of your computer to land on your coffee tables, consecrating your breakfast baguette and cabernet; or that the church today is rife with cowardice and that previous generations would have done their religious duty to God even in the face of death; and lots of other well-meaning but bizarre and even potentially dangerous ideas.

All seem to be predicated on the (correct) conviction that the Eucharist is the primary act of Christian worship, and that it is most fully itself when the whole gathered community can be present; and further, that we are most fully ourselves when we can be present at its celebration. But where they all go off the rails is in the implication that somehow, without direct access to the Divine Mysteries, we lose any sense whatever of Christian life. Our life is bound up in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, certainly. But the Holy Sacrament of the Altar is not something we confect, ex nihilo, from 2300 Bancroft Way at 10am on Sunday mornings. Rather it is something we join, something we participate in, by the Holy Spirit; something which nourishes us in the moment, but which is food far beyond our calendars or our time zones.

The Eucharist we celebrate on Sunday morning is the same Eucharist which Christ offered once on the cross long ago; it is the very same Eucharist which nourishes all the redeemed from every age, even now, where they sit at the eternal banquet table in heaven before the crystal sea. It is the same Eucharist which victorious kings celebrated in ages past as peace finally dawned on their realms; it is the same Eucharist offered by fearful villagers as the Black Death came one town closer to their homes. In times like these, when we are prevented - by very good reason - from participating physically in the offering being made at church, we rely more than ever on this whole vast communion of saints and souls, all of whom carry us with them on their way to their own altars, just as we carry them with us every time we come to our own. The prayer is one, the offering is one, the altars are one, and the Sacrament is one: because God is one, Christ's body is one, and its fellowship is one, in one illimitable communion of love.

What does it mean to rely on this communion? For starters it means we can stop the madness, wondering how will we ever cope, if the Church can survive, what becomes of our Christian life, and all that. Second, it means we do whatever we can, in whatever degree or capacity we can manage, to participate in the ongoing worshiping life of the church -- trusting that, even if it be by Facebook Live or simply the private intentions of our hearts, the Holy Spirit of God nevertheless carries us where we are otherwise prevented from going. And finally, it means that, now more than ever, we get on our knees (figuratively if not literally!) and pray: pray for an end to COVID-19; pray for doctors and nurses and caregivers; pray for victims, pray for their families and friends; pray for all who are economically affected, all who are worried, and all who have no homes or no one to care for them. In this way we unite our hearts, our intentions, our fears, our desires, and all those whom we name, to that whole praying Body which carries us when we cannot carry ourselves -- and so we carry on the witness, locked church doors notwithstanding, to Christ's victorious life by which death is done away, in which we too have place and share.

While we might be most visibly the Church when we are all gathered at the altar offering the Eucharist to the glory of God and the healing of the world, that is not necessarily when we are most truly the Church. We are most truly the Church when we live, as fully as we are able, in imitation of Our Lord: and that means, among other things, joining him in whatever dying and rising again we are called to face, whether that be risking our lives to save another, or staying home from our usual life-giving patterns in order to prevent further spread of a deadly disease. Whatever loneliness or suffering comes along with it, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will use those moments especially to perfect our imitation of the Lord, to pattern our prayer after his, and to draw us ever nearer to that great and final salvation in which the whole Church celebrates the eternal Eucharist, where types and shadows have their ending, and our communion is with the face of God.

So, do not fear! Do not be discouraged! But be persistent in prayer, practice the gratitude which is the heart of the Eucharist, and make a joyful witness to the sure hope of our calling. Together we will come through this, helping one another as we can, singing joyful songs of resurrection.

With love and prayers,
Fr. Blake

The Angelus

A devotion on the Incarnation

V. The angel of the Lord announced unto Mary:

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee:
Blessed art thou among women,
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold, the handmaid of the Lord:

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee:
Blessed art thou among women,
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. And the Word was made flesh:

R. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee:
Blessed art thou among women,
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Pray for us, O holy mother of God:

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:

We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts: that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion (+) we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.