

2nd Sunday of Lent

Liturgical leaders in Australia have invited me from my home in Kansas City, Missouri, in the USA to speak next week at the National Biennial Liturgy Conference in Parramatta, in order to address one of the themes of the upcoming Plenary Council: “How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is prayerful and Eucharistic?” While I’m in your country, a few dioceses have asked me to speak about the liturgy. I thus received the grace of coming here to Stella Maris Parish to meet its faithful members and to experience both catechesis and worship in your beautiful church. I presented on the sacraments of the church by way of their signs to show the richness behind the symbols we employ in the celebration of the liturgy.

No one could have predicted that I would come on the very weekend that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference would inaugurate some changes to the liturgy due to the threats from the coronavirus. Yesterday’s article from *The Catholic Leader* outlines these directives from Archbishop Mark Coleridge, pertaining to Stella Maris and the other parishes of the Archdiocese of Brisbane: “Parishes should refrain from distributing Holy Communion from the chalice until further notice, with a reminder to the faithful that Christ is fully present under either species. All ministers of Holy Communion should wash their hands before and after distributing, and provision should be made for this. When exchanging the Sign of Peace, people should avoid shaking hands but say ‘Peace be with you’ with some eye contact and perhaps an appropriate gesture. Holy water should be temporarily removed from fonts at the doors of churches, though still be available for people to take home. Parishes and other settings where liturgies are celebrated should make alcohol-based gels or rubs (or like products) available near the entrances.” The archbishop said it would be “preferable and perhaps prudent” for people to receive Holy Communion on the hand rather than on the tongue, but the decision remained with the communicant.

My presentations this weekend showed the richness of Catholic symbols such as communion under both kinds and the sign of peace, so the size of the sacrifice you are making is clear to me. Catholics prefer to celebrate mass making full use of symbols, but because of the crisis at hand, another value has come to the fore: the care we owe our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Lent we do without some things that usually bring us joy in order to develop a more willing spirit of sacrifice for the sake of others. These directives will give the local church another way to do the same.

Saint Paul wrote to Timothy, “Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.” God called us to a holy life according to “the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus.” The transfiguration of Christ revealed his glory, and that glory strengthens us to follow him through every hardship. The eucharist is the source and summit of our lives, but it can also be a place of hardship. Archbishop Coleridge said, “we pray fervently that the threat of COVID-19 will ease, that those suffering from the virus will be cured and that those working for its relief will be strengthened.” Let us give life to these prayers by the sacrifices we embrace for the welfare of our brothers and sisters.

Sunday, March 8, 2020