

## LIVING THE FAITH DURING THE LOCKDOWN (John 14:24)

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St. John Cantius Church

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“Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s why it should be evident “that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”<sup>2</sup> For “it is charity which guides us to our final end. It is the love of God and the love of one’s neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the defining teachings of Vatican II was that of the universal call to holiness. The bishops of the Council said everyone in the Church, “whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness.”<sup>4</sup> And “as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law, [charity] rules over all the means of attaining holiness.”<sup>5</sup> This is merely a reiteration and confirmation of what Christ Himself taught his disciples. No one in the Church is excluded from this call to holiness and if one does not strive for it, then he or she is not living the life of the Church that Christ called us to.

I bring this up because during this time when Catholics are becoming increasingly frustrated with the continued closure of churches, suspension of public Masses and lack of access to the sacraments we need to step back a bit and ask if we are living the faith as fully as we can. Your frustration is justified, however, a person can either channel one’s energy into anger, which won’t do much good in changing the situation, or make the best of this situation in order to draw the most good out of it.

But what good may come of it, you may ask. The greater good of discovering a new way of relating to your God; the greater good of a more intimate relationship with Christ because you have to try harder, the greater good of a renewed and richer spiritual life, if you only try. God is allowing this situation and at the same time is calling you now to relate to Him in a new way. The question is whether you are responding to that call. When everything was normal, you would come to Mass on Sunday but much of the rest of your life was consumed with things of this world. But now, you’re left with a lot more time on your hands. So, how are you using it? Are you taking the opportunity to learn more about your faith? Are you praying more? Have you made a home altar? Before you couldn’t attend daily Mass, even if you wanted to, but are you taking the opportunity now to watch our daily live-streamed Masses and join yourselves to the priest’s sacrifice on the altar? Or do you have other more important things to do? Are you dissipated with all sorts of other activities?

The Church says that **all** Catholics are called to holiness. So, the question is: What are you doing about it? Are you praying more? Are you growing in virtue and attempting to harness your sinful desires? If all you can say is that it was so much easier to pray in church, then maybe you don’t really know how to pray. If you think that you can’t practice your faith because you can’t attend Mass, then perhaps you don’t really know how to fully practice your faith, for practicing your faith doesn’t take place only within these walls.

It is easy to be present at Mass as the priest offers Mass at the altar. That's his role in the Church's ministry but each one of you also has a role in the Church's ministry, albeit a different one. Not only are you called to personal holiness but your vocation as a lay Catholic is to help transform the world around you. "In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission ... [and] the laity ... have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.<sup>6</sup> In accordance with your state in life you are called by God to sanctify the world like leaven.<sup>7</sup>

That means that "since [the laity] have an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, laymen are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit, but are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society"<sup>8</sup> and "the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself."<sup>9</sup>

So, I again ask all of you, what are you doing about it? How are you striving during this graced period of time to not only grow in holiness yourselves but also to be a leaven to your family and to the world around you? You may lament that you cannot come to church to pray in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament but He also told us that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>10</sup> If you want His presence among you now, gather around your home altar as a family and call upon His name. He will be there in your midst.

Just as the first Christians gathered together in homes for prayer, it is essential that you do the same in your homes, to grow in personal holiness and to carry out your role in the mission of the Church to sanctify your family. Since the early years of the Church, the family has been called the "domestic church" and in the same manner that the priest is the "Father" of his parish family, the husband and father of the Catholic family is the "domestic priest" of his "domestic church." Just as the priest unifies his flock and leads the Church in prayer, the "domestic priest," as head of his family should be its unifying force, its leader of prayer and its primary teacher of the faith. During this period when churches are closed and public Masses temporarily suspended, it is the opportunity for husbands and fathers to "step up to the plate" and assume their rightful role in the "domestic family" and fulfill their obligations as the "domestic priest," which they have been entrusted with by Christ the High Priest.

We usually make great progress in some endeavor only when we are challenged and forced to find a new way of doing something. Muscles grow only when they are pushed beyond their normal capability. St. John of the Cross, one of the Church's greatest mystics, was thrown into the monastery prison for nine months by his fellow confreres because they weren't keen on his plans for reform of the Carmelites but it was in the misery of his cell, isolated from everyone and deprived of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, that he rose from his despair and realized that God was actually purifying and transforming him. It was in that prison that he wrote his most profound spiritual works and rose to the heights of mystical union with God. It was during the horrors of World War II that St. John Paul II underwent an intense transformation in his spiritual life that would eventually lead him to sainthood. It was during the trials of the war that he discovered his vocation to the priesthood, which not only changed his life but eventually brought him to the papacy. It is often during difficult and challenging times when we grow and

accomplish things that we didn't previously think possible. The same can be with your relationship with God.

We are all looking forward to the opening of our churches and the resumption of normal Catholic worship but until that happens don't waste the opportunity that God has given you at this time for a tremendous growth in grace.

So, I leave you today with two challenges. Are you going to make the best use of this time to grow in personal holiness? And are you, parents and children, going to strive for the sanctification of each other by transforming your families into a true "domestic church?" The choice is yours. You can either use this time for great spiritual benefit or you can waste it away.

<sup>1</sup> John 14:24.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 43.

<sup>9</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 18:20.