

Dear Parishioner(s),

“Strength of faith, certainty of hope, and fervor in charity.” These insightful words from Pope Francis point us in the direction we need as we traverse through these uncharted and troubled waters. As many have said over the past 24 to 48 hours, “Who would have ever guessed we would reach this point due to COVID - 19?” Yet here we are. And...who knows what we will hear next? As our Bishop said in his letter to all the faithful (please see attached), there is so much uncertainty in our lives in the face of this pandemic, something we’ve never experienced before. We are all human, and our concerns are natural. We can’t help but worry about how we will navigate these changes in our lives. Yet, it is in times of trial that we rely on and look to our faith to help us and give us the strength and wisdom to trust and persevere.

Faith is first and foremost a free gift that God gives to humans and as one completely submits themselves to God they begin to recognize the power of that gift. Realizing the power of the gift of faith leads one to not only keep it, but to live on it and profess it to others. The Blessed Mother most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that "with God nothing will be impossible" and so giving her assent: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." Elizabeth greeted her: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed. Throughout her life and until her last ordeal when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary's faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God's word.

Hope is the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in God’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but rather on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is hope that keeps us from discouragement; sustains us during times of abandonment; and opens our heart in anticipating the joy of being with God forever in heaven.

Charity, the greatest of the three, is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things because God loves us first. Jesus died out of love for us and we must take that love into our heart so our human love may be raised to love like Jesus does. Remember always the words of St. Paul who said, “Without love, I am nothing.”

The theological virtues are a pledge from God that He will be actively involved in our day to day life. Faith, hope, and love help us to navigate through the dark and unsettled times of our lives as they enable us to, like Jesus who carried a cross, believe that we are not alone and that there will be help to ease our burdens.

Please know that as your Pastor, I promise to do everything I can to ensure that the needs of the St. Luke family will be met. And, I am grateful to know that I have much support to help meet the needs. I am most grateful for the number of parishioners who have already stepped up to ask what they can do to help the faithful. For example, the Health Ministry Team (HMT) and others are ready to reach out to those who may have physical needs, i.e. groceries; and the HMT is prepared to help answer any concerns, questions, or fears people may have concerning COVID – 19. (Please call the parish office, 825-6920, if you or someone you know needs any assistance.) Another example is a parishioner who asked if he could come in and sanitize the pews and chairs so that people who wanted to come in for private prayer when the church is open would be more confident about doing so. Another example comes from a couple of parishioners who wanted to know if Fr. Murphy or I had any needs they could attend to so that we wouldn’t be stretched too thin. Each of these examples let me know there is a great deal of

faith, hope, and love in the people of St. Luke Parish. *We are in this together and we will walk with Jesus, nurturing each other always through prayer and through additional help when necessary.*

The parish staff met today to plan how we will proceed as a parish community. Please note the following:

1. Please read the attached letter from Bishop Persico
2. The parish website, Facebook, and parish app have all been updated with the latest information concerning the days and weeks ahead. **READ CAREFULLY AS IMPORTANT INFORMATION CONCERNING UPCOMING EVENTS WILL BE POSTED AS WELL AS SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE DURING THESE DAYS OF LENT LEADING TO EASTER**
3. The church will be open for private prayer Monday through Friday between 9:00am – 1:00pm; Saturday and Sunday between 1:00pm – 4:00pm
4. Please remember to maintain adequate social distance between you and others
5. Masses will be celebrated privately by the priests and Mass intentions will be honored as such
6. There will be Exposition of the Eucharist each Monday, 9:00-11:00; Wednesday, 11:00-1:00; and Thursday 9:00-11:00, beginning Monday, March 23rd.
7. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) will be available at regularly scheduled times
8. If you know of someone that is at or near a critical stage in their life and needs receiving the Sacrament of Anointing, please call and let me know and I will visit them
9. Again, please consult the parish website and parish app as we plan to use these tools to not only keep communication lines open but also to post spiritual guidance during these days of Lent leading to Easter
10. For the parishioners that do not have a computer or internet access to receive the updates, the church bulletin will be available at the exits of church with the same information

A parishioner who is a daily Mass attendee had tears in her eyes as she left this morning. My heart broke for her and for all those who love to celebrate the Mass. It is times like this that we realize there are things in life that hit us, things we do not expect, cannot control, are confusing, and can hurt. Remember, God who came into the world in the person of Jesus experienced this as well. The cross He carried was as real as the cross many are carrying these days. Jesus understands, turn to Him. And, as Jesus found a way to reach out and spread the Good News during the darkest of times, so too must we find ways to continue to reach out and bring the Gospel message to others. Remember, that is our call and responsibility as baptized Christians. Faith, hope, and love were stronger than the weight of the cross Jesus carried. Faith, hope and love are stronger than the weight of COVID – 19!

Much peace,
Fr. John