

## HOMILY FOR THE 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

You may have heard certain religious fanatics on the TV or internet trying to make sense of the Coronavirus. They say God is punishing us for our evil ways.

But that couldn't be *further* from the *truth*.

At the *heart* of Catholic theology is a *loving* God. And *because* He loved us into being, He gave us *free will*. God wants us to experience the magnificent heights and tremendous depths of love.

We can't *do* that if we aren't *free*. We can't do that if we aren't *free* to accept or reject love.

God doesn't want a shotgun wedding! And He'll never *force* His affections on us. He loves us too much to do that.

*God* didn't create the corona virus to punish a sinful people. That's one of those things in life that just *happens*! All the suffering and death in the world are not inflicted on us by God.

*The prime cause* of suffering and death *is sin*. *Sin* is nothing more than *separation* from God.

*Sin* is what happens when we try to put *distance* between ourselves and the God of life -- The God of love -- Our truest peace and our greatest joy.

St. Irenaeus said: "The glory of God is man fully alive!"

Well, *how* can a rose be fully alive once it's cut from the vine? It may look *beautiful* and *thriving* for a time, we may have our green-thumb bag of tricks to extend its life in an arrangement -- But once cut from the vine, it's *dying*!

We are most fully alive and our truest selves -- We are at our *happiest* when we are attached to the vine of God's life and love. But we are children of a humanity that cut *itself* off the vine;

They said *no!* to God. This is *original sin*.

When I baptize a baby, I tell the parents that baptism frees their child from original sin. But this baby is so innocent! And without *personal* sin of its own.

Since Adam and Eve said *no* to God's love in the Garden of Eden, They cut themselves off the vine of true happiness and thriving. They separated themselves from God, and they *hid* from Him.

I tell the parents how a baby's first word isn't usually *mama* or *dada* or even *baba*. *Most* often, their first word -- or at least their *favorite* word -- Is "*NO!*"

That's *it!* That's original sin! That thing that makes us *reject* our best interests nurtured by our parents, and going off to make a mess of our lives on our own as if *we* were in charge.

The virus didn't *come* from God, but maybe it *does* remind us we are *not* in charge. But we easily fool ourselves into thinking we *are* in control.

We have that *something* in *each* of us who wants to *detach* ourselves from our loving God -- And even think we could be gods ourselves! And what does that get us? A *false* life.

A life fumbling and stumbling in the dark like the man born blind last week; or a life of a terrible thirst, like the woman at the well, whose thirst was *never* quenched by the water in that well, but only by the *font* of everlasting life -- Jesus Christ.

And today, we meet *Lazarus*. Lazarus was a good person, a *friend* of Jesus'. But whether we are *personally* committing sins or *not*, we still bear the burdens of *original sin's effects* on our world. Bad things just *happen* -- even to good people.

What are the effects?

These last three Sunday's of Lent point them out: *First* -- *We Thirst* for communion with God -- A thirst we often try to slake with garbage substitutes. *Second* -- we falter in the dark, *blind* to our fundamental *need* for God -- Even *hiding* from God like Adam and Eve did. And *third* -- we *die*.

But there's *Good News!*

Jesus Christ has come to *save* us. He *is* the drink that shall give us life. He *is* the light, come to cast the darkness away. And He *is* the *life*, that will destroy death itself.

The Good News is that Jesus, the Son of God, seeks *us* out even when we're trying to hide! The Good News is that God *hates death!* What *is* death, but being cut off from life? Cut off from *God!*

Jesus *wept* for His friend Lazarus. But He's weeping for *all* of us -- We were created for *friendship* with God. And in our dysfunction, in our vulnerability to sin and death,

Jesus weeps.

When you hear Jesus crying out: "Lazarus, come out!" I invite *each* of us to put *our* names in place of Lazarus'. For *each* of us need to be shaken out of death's *grip!* *God* doesn't use death and suffering to punish us! Suffering and death is what we run *into*, when we've run *away* from God.

Evil is but the *absence* of God we choose time to time. God never stops seeking us out to be *one* with Him again. But He's *not* a cosmic *Teddy Bear!* He's not some *apathetic* being who says, "Oh well, I love you *anyway*, so sin all you want!"

*NO!*

*Our* God is more like a vigilant *Mama Bear!* She'll stop at *nothing* to keep us safe and close to herself. She'll rip *apart* the enemy that tries to get between her and her cubs. *That* is why Jesus is *perturbed* in the story.

The Greek for *perturbed* in the original Bible literally means: "He *snorted* in spirit!" Jesus is *angry!* *Not* at *us!* But at what would *keep* us *from* Him. He hated the presence of evil and death itself in our lives. And He would go to His *own* death to break its *hold* over us.

So our challenge today is to *listen* to Christ calling to *us*: “John, come *out!*” or “Mary, come *out!*” Come *out* from the ways of *death*.

Be *untied* from its bindings and its blindfolds! We must listen to Jesus calling us out of a zombie-like state -- A life of sin; a life of the walking dead. His voice *created* the light and the world in the first place. And His voice can set us free.

Do we *hear* Him? Do we *hope* in Him when all else seems lost? He’s *there*; always ready to give us a second chance -- a life begun anew! Like Ebenezer Scrooge, waking up after the horror of the ghost of Christmas future. *Happy* to be *alive!*

*Even* in our anxieties; our fear of death or the unknown; and the pains that strike us, Christ cries out to us!

*What’s* holding us back? *What’s* *my* tomb? We can be wrapped in our own brokenness and sinfulness there; Hidden in the dark, the decay, and the *stench!*

When this virus passes, I urge *everyone* to seize that second chance. Go to confession again. Go to the Eucharist. Gather as *one* in Christ’s body. The body that died and rose again. The body that *thirsts* for *our* love. The body that *weeps* over our frailty, and gives *us* His strength.

*Come out! Be untied! Be free, and fully alive, in the Glory of God’s love.*