**Reflections on Chastisements and the Holy Mass:**

**“Keep Calm and Carry On”**

From Father Alexius to his parishioners

The worldwide reaction to this viral pandemic has caused quite a historical situation. Maybe you are not thinking past the surprise of all of the restrictions that we are suddenly experiencing, but, in truth, you are living in a very significant moment in history which will change our lives for a very long time and, possibly, in unforeseen ways. If you are religiously minded, as a Catholic, as far as I know, there has never been a time in history in which the faithful of the world have been denied entrance to the Mass out of fear for a transmission of a disease. This is a gripping thought. Catholics have sought refuge in churches innumerable times during invasions and natural disasters in the days before infectious diseases were understood. If you would like to see what has happened to the Mass across the world, there is a good run down, country by country at [https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/church-authorities-submit-to-state-authority-suspend-Masses-lock-churches-due-to-coronavirus](https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/church-authorities-submit-to-state-authority-suspend-masses-lock-churches-due-to-coronavirus). (If you are on the internet as you read this letter, place your pointer over the link and press the “Ctrl” key and left click on your mouse pad at the same time and your browser will open the article) It is striking to realize that we are suspended from engaging in the most fundamental aspect of our existence: society, interacting with one another in a natural way. We are created to be in our essence, societal creatures

***Is this a chastisement by God or the End of Time?***

This question has been put to me by a few of you. Are these times the beginning of the fulfillment of private revelations and prophecies of the likes of St. Padre Pio as some parishioners have asked me?

Let’s consider the idea of this “chastisement” from two different points of view: numbers, and relationship to God and neighbor.

Numbers: If this Corona virus situation is defined as a Divine chastisement by the number of people infected and dying then we must say that we (the United States) have a yearly chastisement every influenza season, because according to the Center for Disease Control ( or ‘CDC’ – which is a governmental agency under the Department of Health and Human Services) every year since 2010 has brought us between 12,000 and 61,000 deaths from the influenza. That high number of 61,000 (from the 2017-2018 season) is still in flux and being counted according to the CDC’s statistics online. (See <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/index.html>) So, if 61,000 Americans died two years ago, why is this year’s Corona virus deaths of around 3,000 (which is so far below the yearly deaths from the flu) as of this writing, being considered a possible chastisement?

From the point of view of relationship with God and neighbor, we are suffering the loss of being present at the holiest moment in time, the Holy Mass and we are quarantined from society. Is this because of the number of deaths? Not if we factor in the yearly influenza-caused deaths. Therefore, some other force is driving enforced isolation and that force is born out of a human response. *We* have decided to take the precautions as they currently are. This response, which is to isolate us from one another, may in the end prove to have been the right thing. But it still begs the question of why we feel safe in other years when, as a country, we experience 20 times the number of deaths we currently have and do relatively nothing, but with 2,828 as of today, we enact draconian measures.

 **I understand that more deaths are expected and I have seen enormous numbers of such but I cannot simply call this a chastisement. However, no one knows the Divine recipe for a chastisement.**

Yet, while I am at it, honestly, every catastrophe or death is a chastisement in the sense that God allows such to turn our heads back to the right ways. St. Paul gives us the final word on chastisements in his letter to Hebrews when he states “*For whom the Lord loves, he chastises; and he scourges every son whom he receives*.” I don’t know if that disturbs your ideas about God but that’s what the Holy Spirit revealed to St. Paul. Everything God does or allows is done in love. After all, he even chastised his own son for our sins.

To this being the start of the Apocalypse, I can only say that we will know when the Apocalypse has arrived when it arrives.

***Why do people ask these questions of chastisement or of the Apocalypse?***

It is because of the Scriptures. Yet, according to them, we cannot know of the End beforehand. Regardless, Christ expects us to not stop our responsibilities but to continue to serve God and family in love and so shall such a man be rewarded for not worrying for his own life but for the lives of those he is responsible for. (*And now there remain faith, hope, and charity (love), these three: but the greatest of these is charity* (love). 1 Cor 13:13).

**For you, I include what Jesus says over the time when the world shall be consumed. As Jesus does speak about it in the gospels, it is a worthy endeavor to seek his words. From the Gospel of Matthew:24.**

*[11] And many false prophets shall rise, and shall seduce many. [12] And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold. [13] But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved. [14] And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations,* ***and then shall the consummation come****. [15] When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place: he that readeth let him understand.*

*[21] For there shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be. [22] And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved: but for the sake of the elect those days shall be shortened. [23] Then if any man shall say to you: Lo here is Christ, or there, do not believe him. [24] For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect. [25] Behold I have told it to you, beforehand.*

*Wheresoever the body shall be, there shall the eagles also be gathered together. [29] And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved: [30] And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty.*

*[28] "Wheresoever": The coming of Christ shall be sudden, and manifest to all the world, like lightning: and wheresoever he shall come, thither shall all mankind be gathered to him, as eagles are gathered about a dead body.*

*[31] And he shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them. [34] Amen I say to you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. [35] Heaven and earth shall pass, but my words shall not pass.*

*[36****] But of that day and hour no one knoweth, not the angels of heaven, but the Father alone.*** *[37] And as in the days of Noah so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. [38] For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the ark, [39] And they knew not till the flood came, and took them all away; so also shall the coming of the Son of man be. [40] Then two shall be in the field: one shall be taken, and one shall be left.*

*[41] Two women shall be grinding at the mill: one shall be taken, and one shall be left. [42] Watch ye therefore, because ye know not what hour your Lord will come. [43]* ***But know this ye, that if the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch, and would not suffer his house to be broken open.*** *[44]* ***Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come.*** *[45] Who, thinkest thou, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath appointed over his family, to give them meat in season.*

*[46****] Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing****. [47] Amen I say to you, he shall place him over all his goods.*

St. Paul echoes Jesus when he says in the first letter to the Thessalonians:5;

*[2] For yourselves know perfectly, that* ***the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night.*** *[3] For when they shall say, peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them, as the pains upon her that is with child, and they shall not escape. [4]* ***But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief****. [5****] For all you are the children of light, and children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness****.*

*[6]* ***Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do; but let us watch, and be sober****. [7] For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunk, are drunk in the night. [8] But let us, who are of the day, be sober, having on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*

So, the short answer is, we will know when we know but, per St. Paul, those who are the brethren (the faithful of the church) are not in darkness but should know to always be vigilant.

***To whom much has been given, much will be expected.* (Luke 12:48)**

Is this time of pause a time of “much?” The arrival of the sun every morning seems to add more concerns from people. Some of these concerns have manifested themselves and are real. Some of them are truly upon us. Others are imaginative or yet to come. Yet as a religious people, we should see in this a precious gift not to be wasted. Time.

*This gift of time is the cause of this* *letter,* meaning I wish to spend time because of this historic absence of the faithful in Mass. What is this Mass we are barred from because of a virus? Now is the perfect time to ask questions. Although not all of us have slowed down, many have and with this larger amount of time, our Lord, who is the Master of Time, would rightfully expect us to spend some of it on pondering our religion.

***“I don’t miss being in Mass. Am I wrong for this?”***

This question goes to two things. First, understanding what the Mass is and second, whether you possess the Gift of Faith. The second might surprise you for I have heard people claim faith in Jesus but have no devotion to the Mass. But the Gift of Faith is tied to the Mass according to the actions of Jesus who spoke directly to the Apostles when he said “***Do this in memory of me***.” (1 Cor 11:24)

 ***“I can remember Jesus at home.”***

 Yes, you can remember Jesus anywhere you want. But Jesus is specific. He is not saying, “When you have some time… remember me”. For the word “remembrance” he is quoting the Greek word ἀνάμνησις (*anamnesis*) which means far more than setting aside a moment to remember Jesus. This word *anamnesis* is not the act of remembering. It is what makes someone remember. In other words, Jesus is saying that if you wish to remember Him, what will cause you to do so is the Breaking of the Bread (The Mass.) Perhaps a better word than remembrance is commemoration or memorial, which makes us think of an act associated with the past. During the Mass, the Passion of Jesus supernaturally comes into the present, during this specific commemoration/ memorial done by the Breaking of the bread. On an altar. By a priest. This is more than having your own memory.

A deeper understanding of this word *anamnesis* would be “to make present again” as a commemoration ceremony attempts (but never succeeds) to do. So, Jesus is saying, that this act of Breaking the bread will bring Jesus and His Passion into our presence.

This is different from simply setting aside a moment to remember. Like a moment of silent memory. The Greek have another word for that; ἀναμνηστικός or *anamnestikos*, which simply means being able to recall to the mind readily. Jesus does not use this word. He uses a word that has commemorative acts associated with it. You know what they are…the words of Consecration, “Take this all of you and eat of it…”

***“Only 1 out of every 4 Catholics go to Mass. Science has replaced the ignorance of the centuries past when “God” was seen as the direct cause in many things we now can answer through science. How can I be convinced that the Mass is everything the Church says it is?”***

Through Faith (with a capital ‘F’, as in the Gift of Faith). Although the Mass does answer questions that are deeper than the questions of science (which is only looking for immediate cause and effect) the mass is a both/and when it comes to considering earthly life. The Mass does effect Creation by mysteriously perfecting it by the Blood of Christ offered at the Mass. At the same time the Mass is not “used” but is entered into, by us, as direct and Divinely designed worship. The last thing you should consider, when it comes to thinking of the Mass, is to consider its practical effects. The Mass will not magically pay your car note or provide financial relief as some faith traditions believe. The Mass does not endow you *quid pro quo -* this for that. You come to the Mass to Worship God in Faith through the Sacrifice and Resurrection of Jesus. The purpose of the Mass is the Mass. Mass for the sake of Mass. Mass is its own reward. That you have prayed through the Mass is your reward. You have done the bidding of He whose sacrifice the Mass brings into time.

Anyone who approaches the Mass for practical effects and forgets all of its symbols and prayers which unites us to every other Catholic and the Communion of Saints and Angels, who forgets that the Mass is the re-presentation, in real time of the Crucified and resurrected Christ, who forgets (or ignores) the added consideration that one must be in a “State of Grace” to receive communion and that to miss Mass without just cause is punishable by God, that person is stepping outside of the eternal ways of God and into the tiring and changing mindset of the world. Haven’t we had enough of ourselves already?

A secularist is one who lives life for the effects he can achieve through his own power with no consideration given to the eternal and continuing story of God which is the source of everything. This borders on a type of atheism. While the secularist, the man who sees life without God, even if living very virtuously, may achieve profound successes on his own, he can never claim to have reached a point in which all of his successes have brought him to a permanent place of happiness. He is only as good as his latest success. How fatiguing a mindset to love by. And when he dies, his successes stay here.

***Everything we do, good or bad, has the desire for God hidden in it. Whether we know it or not, God is in every desire***

As a priest with my specific experiences of life, I have never seen a human act without an implicit hunger for God contained in that act. Even the secularist or the atheist, for all they deny, act in a way that only God can be the ultimate answer for. Yes, the God they “worship” is not the God of the Mass but nonetheless, they, and all men, approach life with the need of God written in their actions. Whether we reach for the one True God or a false God is another matter. But the desire for God is in man’s nature.

***Different ways we implicitly show a desire for a true God*.**

1. We implicitly show our desire for God in our need to be judged as excellent. Some men resist the examining of their conscience and the forgiveness through Confession by which man regains the baptismal state of grace by God. Yet even those men seek to be known as excellent in some way according to the limited and faulty judgments of other men, just to hear that they have done excellently. If you think of it, as humans, we want to be judged. We do not keep our works hidden. We place them to be seen. Do you deny this? I offer one word as one simple example: Facebook. We desire to be known. Even when we advertise our struggles, we desire to be known as excellent in some way. In turn, everyone who knows about us in some way, even in perfect charity, makes a judgment of us and we of them. Judging is part of the process of knowing. It is the standards of judging that make judgment a sin or not. Only a true God has the ability to judge us and love us perfectly. The judgment we desire from other men is perfected by the Holy Spirit of Jesus and Jesus is gained through the mass. Those who are aligned with God through the Mass, if they cooperate with its graces, will, in Faith and Charity (Love), judge heart-fully and patiently with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those who go it alone, have given up what perfects man: The Mass.

2. We implicitly show our desire for God by wishing to be free of our hidden pains and faults. Jesus as the Divine physician can accomplish this if he is God. Otherwise we seek to escape our pains and memories through such things as drugs or alcohol or other diversions which make us forget for a time or even lift us into a false euphoria. The use of substances or anything or any person or any activity to bide our time through shows our implicit desire for lasting happiness and the escape from pain. But there is no earthly source of lasting happiness. The Mass is a dynamo of Divine aid. It is a power source. It is the source of life. ***He who eats my body and drinks my blood shall gain eternal life.* (John 6:54)**

3. We implicitly show our desire for God in our desire to possess truth. Yet, how harsh we can be as we drift from one idea to another and can become quite aggressive when another person disagrees with us (as they possibly should). Where is eternal unchanging truth but in God alone? Yet because we can find many minor truths to dwell upon, man can elect to replace the Great Truth, the source who is Truth Himself and ornament himself with little truths he might possess, by claiming those truths as his identity. By vanity, we are tempted away from the Mass where Truth itself is offered by the Eucharist and the Gifts of the Holy spirit (which are all about knowledge) abound. **“*I am the way, the truth and the life.*” (John 14:6)**

This should be enough to tell you that the excellent things we long for are given to us by God who meets us, above all, through Jesus in the Sacrifice of the Mass, according to the Holy Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition.

***It was so from the beginning***

In your search for serenity and lasting happiness, in your aspirations to be a virtuous person and raise your children in love and to be a good spouse or even to suffer well, why should the Mass be your destination? Because it was so from the beginning when God named the day after Creation was finished as Rest Day. (*Sabbth* in Hebrew) Does rest not bring you joy? Does rest not allow you the moment to hold your child and be filled with the beautiful reality in front of you? Is rest not in play when your mind calms down and you find the room to admire the setting or rising of the sun? Rest is, in a sense, a time of victory. You are not being pursued. You are in peace. If the Rest Day is Sunday, then is there anything otherwise you should behold? Assuredly, it is God himself who has given to you all that is good. Can you truly rest if you avoid the Mass and live in remorse?

God has reminded us to keep the Sabbath Holy. Thinking as God thinks, can you truly convince yourself that this can be done outside of the Mass where you come to receive God and contemplate God? The Mass has been present to the Church since the night Jesus was betrayed.

If you can convince yourself that the Mass is a side thought, a nice thing and all but certainly not necessary, then it is time to sit down and think purely through the ways of God open to you and to forget the rampant, insane skepticism which has settled upon us and has made of us slaves to what is passing. Does 2000 years of Catholic continuation across the globe tell you anything, you who will live to an age probably less than 100 years?

***“If I admit that the Mass is pleasing to God and Holy, what actually transpires in Mass? What comes from the Mass in plain words?”***

This answer comes from the fact that the sacrifice of Jesus is one with the Mass. Thus everything you are given by God through the Mass, is given because the Mass is the re-presentation of the eternal sacrifice of Jesus which occurred in time but which remains active outside of time and never-ending because it was committed by the human nature of God (Jesus) out of ineffable love for the Father.

**This is what you gain through your attendance at Mass:**

1. Because Jesus asked the Father to forgive us, *for we know not what we do*, in love for his Son, God the Father grants our prayers and endows us with graces and benefits of a spiritual and temporal (in time) nature. Furthermore, these gifts are innumerable. Who can know what might have occurred to us had we not been docile to God in our Mass attendance?
2. The wrath of God over our divorce of him when we effectively placed ourselves into the hands of the enemy is now taken away by the perfect love of the Passion of Jesus.
3. In line with no. 2, our sins are forgiven, unless they be certain types of sin which are particularly offensive to God and involve outright disobedience on our part, in which case sacramental confession must be sought. Jesus himself instituted the Sacrament of Confession on the day he resurrected from the Dead as you can read in John:20.
4. The temporal punishment of past sin is taken away. This means that in the Mass, some or all of the punishment we deserve after our death, if we are judged good enough to avoid Hell but not ready for Heaven, is taken away. In other words, the Mass, prepares us for the potential of immediate access to heaven if we are in a state of grace and full of perfect contrition. This is why we begin the Mass with the Admission of our sinfulness.

This is a short treatment on a very, very large subject. If it is not enough for you, come talk to me. That is what I am here for.

May God bless you and all those you love and even those whom you do not love. May God bless and keep us all.