

[Readings: Exodus 34: 4b-6, 8-9; Daniel 3:52-55; 2 Cor. 13:11-13; John 3:16-18]

When I first looked at the three readings for today's Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, I paused, I gasped, and then I smiled. What an awesome message you and I, our country and our world need to hear! The Holy Spirit inspired today's readings!

This has been a time of dismay and discouragement. The COVID-19 pandemic. The civil unrest ignited by anger, fear, frustration and exhaustion. What would the patron saint of our parish, St. Martin de Porres, born of a Spanish father and an African slave mother, say? He is a patron saint of race relations, reconciliation and racial harmony. Have we done enough to make us all equal members of the human race while respecting ethnicity, diversity, and the common good? The facts suggest we haven't yet reached that goal.

Speaking at his Wednesday general audience from his papal library on June 3, our Holy Father Pope Francis said: "Dear brothers and sisters in the United States, I have witnessed with great concern the disturbing social unrest in your nation in these past days, following the tragic death of Mr. George Floyd. We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time, we have to recognize that the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost."

Add to this, the news that all the parishes of the Archdiocese of Detroit are going into a new process that will redefine our identity and our future.

Someone asked me recently, "How much more can we take?" And I was reminded of what Archbishop Vigneron said shortly after he arrived here 11 years ago: "There is no sin that cannot be redeemed. There is no suffering that cannot heal. There is no death that cannot result in new life."

In today's First Reading, Moses is taking a second trip up Mount Sinai to get another copy of the Ten Commandments. When he had first come down the mountain to present the original tablets to the Chosen People, Moses saw the sin, the idolatry, and the moral corruption that had taken over God's people during his absence. In anger, Moses throws the tablets at the unfaithful people, and they shatter.

Now, humiliated, Moses slithers back up the mountain, at God's command, with the broken tablets in his arms. In spite of sin, God still gives the people a second chance. God seals the deal by proclaiming the Divine Name of Yahweh, "I am who I am."

Then God gives Moses His own job description: God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity. The response of Moses is to invite God to pardon and to accompany the Chosen People once more and to receive those stiff-necked people once again as God's own.

We need, as individuals and as a nation, to acknowledge our own stiff-necks, our own sins against God and against one another. Let's do that today. To be sorry for any time that we ourselves have been guilty of selfishness and pride. To be sorry when we have failed to see and acknowledge each other as brothers and sisters who are members of the universal human race.

St. Paul echoes this sentiment in our Second Reading, when he gives us the recipe for how God's love and peace will be with us. St. Paul challenges us to mend our ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, even if it means to agree to disagree, and to live in peace with each other.

He concludes with the greeting with which we are familiar at the beginning of Mass: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." Have you ever stopped to think about what the words of this greeting really means? If you have, then you have a grasp of today's Solemn Feast of the Holy Trinity.

The "grace" of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Grace" comes from the Greek word, "charis" which really means "gift." The "gift" of our Lord Jesus Christ is what we NEED to get to Heaven, and I dare say, what we WANT to make our lives have purpose. I think that makes it quite clear that we really, really do NEED Jesus Christ in order to experience repentance, forgiveness, salvation, joy and lasting peace.

The "love" of God... There is only one word for love in English; there are at least three words for love in Greek. There is Philos, the love that brothers and sisters share. "Phila-dephia" is the City of Brotherly Love. There is Eros, the love that only a husband and wife are supposed to share. We get the word "erotic" from Eros. Then there is Agape. It's hard to describe Agape, other than to say that it is the complete and unconditional love and faithfulness that God shows us as God's favorite creation. You and I are incapable of such perfect love. But we do catch glimpses of it from time to time, when God sends us special people and events into our lives.

Finally, "fellowship" or "communion." What does it take to build a community?

Look at your own household. Who's in charge? What is the quality of the

relationships under your home roof? Can one easily see the fruits of the Holy Spirit when they step into your home: gentleness, peacefulness, joy, holiness, modesty, self-control?

A good experience of a family gathering “breathes life” into the family, whether that is through affection and song, or debating and laughing together. The Holy Spirit is that Divine Breath that keeps relationships alive. When we reflect what we are inside, the image and likeness of God, it’s easy to share in their fellowship and community.

In the light of the social chaos around us, we need to become people of grace, love and fellowship. Quoting the Serenity Prayer, I heard someone say, “I am tired of accepting the things I cannot change. I want to change the things I cannot accept!”

A novel fad that has swept the world is the concept of the “selfie.” The person taking the selfie has himself or herself in the middle of the photo op. It’s all about ME. If God took a selfie, it would not be about ME, it would be more about WE. It’s a team effort to redeem the world. The love between Father and Son is the Holy Spirit. When that unity of love is seen and experienced and shared, only then does God enter our hearts and our world.

In the movie, “Bruce Almighty,” Bruce (Jim Carrey) asks God (Morgan Freeman), “How do you make someone love you without affecting free will?” And God answers, “Welcome to my world, son. When you get that one figured out, let me know.”

Here is what St. John says in today’s Gospel: “God so loved the world, that He gave us His Only Son.” I wish that sentence was not in the past tense, as something done, completed and over. I wish it could say, “God so LOVES the world, that God GIVES us the Son and their Spirit.” God still loves. God still gives. God gives in His Holy Word. God gives in this Eucharist! God gives in the ministry, service and action we provide for our families, our community, and our world. We can continue, and thus eventually become that giving, “Triune” action of God today. WE could love the world so much, that WE could give the world our very selves, so that everyone who believes in the message WE bring -- about the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit -- “might not perish but might have eternal life.” AMEN!

[Deut. 8:2-3, 14b-16a; Psalm 147; 1 Cor 10:16-17; John 6:51-58]

In 1993, the year I became a pastor for the first time, McDonald's sold its 100 billionth hamburger. No connection between the two events! Because only two digits fit on their existing signs, it was decided to permanently install the count at McDonald's as "Over 99 Billion Served." The hamburger is far from dead meat.

By comparison: How many times have you and I shared in the meal that offers us life everlasting? The cradle Catholic who receives First Eucharist at age seven or eight and continues to be faithful to the weekly liturgy stands a chance of participating in this sacred feast some 4,000 times during an average life, give or take holy days.

If you're a daily Mass-goer, make that upwards of 25,000 Very Happy Meals. Yet there's no contest to beef up our numbers.

Yet a single "full, active, and conscious" act of participation in the Eucharist brings us hope of eternal life. That sounds great for later; but eternal life actually means the fullness of life starting *here and now*. If you want it, this table is about to be set and you're invited. The Body and Blood of Christ isn't only something we "get" at every Eucharist. It's also what we *become*. We *receive* Christ. We *become* Christ. And we go forth to *bring* Christ out to a world in great need of this food.

Our society is dying of a thousand unnamed hungers; society still is heading out day after day, generation after generation, for the happy meals of wealth, power, and privilege; romance, sensation, addiction; entertainment, amusement, any kind of distraction -- hoping for satisfaction from all these. Those meals serve billions, it's true. But the reason the world keeps serving them up is because we're bound to return, with empty plates and emptier spirits. It really never satisfies us for long.

Our hungers, whether physical, emotional, social, or spiritual, can all tend to blend together. The nutritionists are right: We ought to become clear about the true nature of our hungers. How would you describe your deepest spiritual hunger?

Spiritually, what do you need the most? What spiritual food would be most satisfying? How is this nourishment available to you? Come the table...

Hungry hearts are all around us. Those mourning the loss of a loved one, in need of a job, desperate for wise counsel, unable to curb an addiction, angry and bitter.

Hungry hearts may be unforgiven or unforgiving, in poor health, worried about finances, unhappy in a relationship, unsure of their commitments, hard on themselves, afraid of the world around them, and the list goes on and on. These are the people Jesus offers to feed -- not with a temporary fix (which is usually what most of us want) -- but an everlasting source of sustenance that can be found in the change of heart that happens each time we gather to share a meal in Jesus' Holy Name.

Of course, Jesus feeds us when we approach the table of the Eucharist worthily and without sin. "Don't forget what the Lord has done for you." Those were Moses' last words to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land without him. "Don't forget what the Lord DOES for you."

In a recent letter to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Pope Francis reminds all of you folk -- especially those to be received into the Catholic Church this weekend -- to develop your role as a lay person in the world. You are NOT "second class members" after clergy and religious, but instead you participate in Christ's priestly role through your own work in the world. Francis says that lay people "participate, in their own way, in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ himself. You are called to animate every space, every activity, and every human relation according to the Spirit of the Gospel.

"You bring light, hope and love received from Christ in His Word and Sacrament to those places that, otherwise might remain unknown to the action of God and abandoned to the misery of the human condition. No one can carry out better than you this essential work to see that the Divine Law is inscribed in the life of the Earthly City."

The work of the Church is not reserved to some "mission professionals," but is meant to be undertaken by all. We are all called to make holy the family, the home, the parish, and the world in which we live by our holy examples of service and integrity of life, by proclaiming the Gospel, by speaking of how God works in our daily lives.

St. Pope John Paul II, said it even more simply: "You can go and preach and witness in places where I cannot. I can bring Jesus Christ on the altar and into the bread and wine; you can bring Jesus Christ into the world with your hands, your feet and your heart. With your very lives." Get to work! AMEN!

[Readings: Jer. 20-10-13; Psalm 69; Rom. 5:12-15; Matt. 10:26-33]

“I hear the whispering of many.” What is the local grapevine saying about you that troubles you? How does it affect your ability to do your job well? How do you deal with gossip at work, at school, at the game, and I dare say, here in the church parking lot or even in this very worship space? “Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed.” Do you have secrets about yourself? How do these connect with your fears? What would be likely to happen if your deepest, darkest secrets were made public? What does this awareness spur you to do so as to live a more integrated life? Poor Jeremiah. Poor you. Poor me.

All of us have suffered to some degree the personal agony of having someone lessen our good name, or blacken our reputation by spreading false reports about us, or by misinterpreting our actions, or by twisting the meaning of our words or by misjudging our intentions and emotions. Few things, if any, are more precious to someone than his or her good name and good health. And yet, if we have suffered from having our good name damaged, we probably have also done our own fair share of lessening other people's good names as well – sometimes unknowingly, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes perhaps even maliciously. Even if the information is true.

This is a form of “bearing false witness,” as forbidden by the Eighth Commandment. We bear true witness for false reasons. Pope Francis says that this is tantamount to verbal or psychic murder – That's the Fifth Commandment. We kill the good name and reputation of someone with false reports, false interpretations, or simply by passing along juicy and malicious gossip. Even if the information is true, it is called slander. Libel if it is in written form. If the information is false, it is called calumny. All are deadly – to you and to your victim. The damage done cannot be revoked, much like trying to put back into a torn pillow its feathers now blowing in the wind after shaking the pillow outdoors.

What is the motive for spreading such bad news? Is it jealousy, self-righteousness, the hurt inflicted upon us by another, our desire to appear more important than others? What do we do with this? Where do we go?

We take consolation in the words of Jeremiah: "But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion." Our hope is that not only will the Lord restore our good name, if tarnished, but that the Lord will punish those who knowingly and maliciously have tried to hurt us. We leave the judgement and the punishment up to God.

Finally, Jesus tells us in the Gospel today that we shouldn't really worry about those who try to harm us, unless they also have the power to stifle the life of grace within us or can force us to deny Jesus. In short, safeguard the good name of others, and God will safeguard yours.

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, psychiatrist, author and survivor of the Nazi regime, Viktor Frankl wrote this: "We who have lived in concentration camps can remember those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number; but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from [you] but one thing, the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's own way."

On any given day, we can look at our world and view it as a "concentration camp," a prison created by human sin. We can assess the violence, the inhumanity and the injustice and decide that sin seems to have taken the upper hand and has the world and all its peoples in a stranglehold. But St. Paul, in our Second Reading will not allow such negativity. Anyone can give up in the face of sin. But the graced person freely chooses another path, and that choice can make all the difference. Pope Francis says that we must see our role as a Church to be a field hospital after battle. Or, in our present situation, a field hospital during the current wars we are fighting. Pope Francis says, "It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else." You have to heal his wounds first. Then talk.

St. Paul puts it this way: "For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many." Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Fear

imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals." "You are worth more." Than fear.

The gift bestowed by Jesus is the reason we can preach the Gospel without fear. Jesus does not deny the darkness, the possibility of death to those who both preach and live the Gospel. The body can be killed!

In fact, Christians should expect this violence if we live as citizens of the kingdom of God. Citizens of this kingdom proclaim and live a peace that the secular world rejects. We give our cloak over to the one who has wronged us, our face to be spit upon. We recognize the dignity of every life, every race, every person, no matter their age.

And now, some thoughts on Father's Day.

Even though we are finally creeping up on its halfway point, the year 2020 still seems like the year that will never end. What started as a year certain to be dominated by a presidential campaign and election has turned into a year of pandemic, economic woes, joblessness and continued racial strife. Our nation is divided. Struggling to find balance, perspective and truth, we are a society and a Church deeply in need of strong fathers.

In our Catholic tradition, fathers occupy a critical role in both arenas. In our homes, fathers are called to lead the family by their good example -- to love their spouses as Christ loved the Church (that is, to give their very lives for them) and to raise their children in the practice of the Faith, relying on the dual pillars of truth and mercy. As we honor our fathers this Father's Day, we thank our priests and dads for the work they have done to help our society and our Church through this difficult time. And we encourage them to keep it up by continuing to lead by a solid, Christian example. Dads, our nation needs you. Our Church needs you. Your children need you. Perhaps more than you will ever know! AMEN!



[Readings: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a; Psalm 89; Rom. 6:3-4, 8-11; Matt 10:37-42]

One of my favorite classic musical movies is “Fiddler on the Roof.” The basic premise of the movie is how Tevye, an Orthodox Jewish milkman living in a small, forgotten Russian village in the early 1900’s, watches his world of “tradition” be challenged on every side. His three eldest daughters get married during the course of the movie. But all three do so outside of the established “tradition” of the matchmaker. The eldest daughter does not rely on the matchmaker, but on true love, and is married in the traditional Jewish ceremony. The second marries a man who is Jewish, but is an atheist. Tevye bends for the first two daughters, but cannot with the third. She elopes with a man who is Russian Orthodox. Tevye puts his faith and his religion above family.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples plainly: No love can be higher than your love for me. All relationships must be put in proper priority. None can be higher than one’s relationship with God. Not even family love -- a teaching that upsets most of us, since we really do love our families and hold this bond as quite sacred.

Even dearer: We’re told we can’t hold our own lives as more precious than the loyalty we owe to Jesus. That’s because we are asked to evaluate our lives in light of the crosses that life throws at us. Jesus makes specific reference to the crosses we are facing right now. Unfortunately, the initial reaction for us when we are asked to take up our cross is to see it as a burden.

But before we jump to that initial reaction, think for a moment about THE cross. The cross -- because of Jesus -- is not a burden, but a sign of victory and love. So, if we then think about Jesus telling us to take up our symbol of victory and love and follow Him and serve others, then it is not such a burden. Our lives of service to God and others should never be seen as a burden. It may be challenging, but it is never a burden.

In our First Reading, the challenge faced by the woman in the story seemed like a burden, until she was encouraged to do it in faith. The result was that the situation worked out better than she planned. Her approach to the situation was filled with faith and courage. She was promised that all would work out and it did and so it can be for us. Our problem is when we view our lives only as filled with insurmountable challenges.

We see everything as if we are being burdened and inconvenienced. The result is that we react that way. We never approach things with joy, but an exhaling of air in exasperation. That’s when we are challenged to respond with loyalty. Loyalty to God, to our faith, to God’s Plan.

Loyalty is a quality we value highly. We want our friends to be loyal. We expect our families to be. We hope for some modicum of reliability from bosses or employees. Even the President expects loyalty. In fact, every meaningful relationship involves loyalty to be viable. We pledge allegiance to the flag, acknowledging our citizenship.

We support our parish financially as a sign that we're members who value what happens here.

Pledging allegiance and choosing loyalties is another theme of our Readings. A woman of influence and means informs her husband that she'd like to make an investment in a certain Hebrew prophet, Elisha. As a citizen of Shunem, this is an irregular alliance. Shunemites and Israelites didn't get along. The woman remodels her house to make room for a prophet she hopes to have as a frequent guest.

In another century, Saint Paul assures us that our Baptism unites us not only with Christ-life but also with Christ-death. Here's an allegiance we might not knowingly be pledging. Loyalty to Christ provides astounding benefits, including resurrection from the dead and newness of life. But we get there by way of surrender, un-spelled-out suffering, and death to self-will. We are warned!

Once upon a time, the great emperor Constantine was given a vision. He was shown a cross in the sky and was told by the Lord, "by this sign you will conquer"; and he did. It is by the same sign that you too will conquer over every challenge you face in your life.

Pick up your sign of victory and love and head into the day. With this sign, you can overcome personal and professional problems. You can overcome money issues and you can overcome fear or addiction issues. You can put your illnesses and limitations in perspective. We can put COVID-19, our broken economy and our racially fractured nation in perspective. Our faith, our hope and our love will conquer the atheism, the despair and the hatred that is being stoked in our cities and in our homes.

We pick up our crosses to find the strength we need to bring light to the darkness of the world and to provide hope to the hopeless. We simply can't be good ministers and servants of the Gospel unless we take up the cross, the sign of victory and love. AMEN!