

Updated Pastor's Column for Sunday, March 22

This Fourth Sunday of Lent (commonly called Laetare Sunday) is usually a joyful midpoint to the Lenten season. But this has turned out to be a Lent unlike any we have ever experienced in our lifetimes. As you know by now, all public Masses and all parish and diocesan meetings and other activities have been cancelled until further notice. These are radical but necessary precautions as our society - and indeed the whole world - responds to the threat of the COVID 19 coronavirus pandemic.

In this challenging time, I think it is especially important that we try to keep in touch with one another and with as many people as we can - especially those who may be lonely or particularly frightened. Loneliness and fear are themselves deadly. Of course, we are all frightened, and we should not be ashamed to acknowledge and admit our fears. But even in this time of social distancing - especially in this time - we need not be completely alone. We need to assure one another - and be reassured ourselves - of God's presence and action in our world and of the help and support of God's People for one another!

I invite everyone to pray Pope Francis's Prayer to Our Lady Health of the Sick and Salvation of the Roman People. The image of Mary, Salvation of the Roman People, in the Roman Basilica of Saint Mary Major, was particularly dear to Isaac Hecker, the founder of the Paulist Fathers, and it is particularly dear to Pope Francis, who visited it again last Sunday and then went on from there to visit the Roman church of San Marcello al Corso to venerate its 16th-century "Plague Crucifix." There is also an ancient Lenten practice of praying the Seven penitential Psalms and the Litany of the Saints, which I would also recommend.

I encourage everyone to check the parish website on a regular basis. Also the diocesan website (<https://dioknox.org/>) is an important resource for information and connection. Finally, I want to express my personal thanks for all the messages of sympathy and prayer for me and my family following the death of my mother, Camille Franco, on March 5 and my cousin, Isabel Cavanagh, on March 15.

PRAYER OF POPE FRANCIS TO MARY, HEALTH OF THE SICK:

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope.

We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick.

**At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain,
with steadfast faith.**

You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need.

**We are certain that you will provide, so that,
as you did at Cana of Galilee,
joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.**

**Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the Father's will
and to do what Jesus tells us:**

**He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us,
through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.**

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God.

**Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.**