

“Be Strong and of Good Courage....”

As we embark on this challenging journey together, listen for the echo of Joshua as he led the Israelites across the Jordan into the Holy Land after their long and challenging sojourn through the desert: “*Be strong and of good courage.*” Recall, too, the words of St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans, “*All things work for the good for those who love God.*” All things. Our way of life has been disrupted and worry and fear may have crept in. And yet, our Lord invites us to unite our sufferings to His – particularly in this Season of Lent - and allow Him to transform our offerings into grace. In other words, this time of testing that we are enduring has become an opportunity for grace. Consider the anxieties that crept into the hearts of the Apostles in the Upper Room the night before Jesus began His Passion. Jesus reassured them with the tender command: “*Let not your hearts be troubled*”. He promised that He would never abandon them. Encouraging them to pray faithfully and to trust Him implicitly, He would provide an abundance of graces to them in every circumstance. He imparted to them His Peace – true, spiritual peace. ‘Trust Me.’

Consider, too, the Israelites of Old as they wandered through the desert. We are experiencing a ‘spiritual desert’ in our absence from reception of Holy Eucharist – the Bread of Life. Of all the many disruptions we are experiencing at the moment, it is the greatest deprivation. And yet, even in these circumstances, our Lord provides and indeed invites us to new spiritual growth. We are able to make a “spiritual communion” every day. Various Saints throughout the ages have encouraged the faithful in circumstances such as these to thirst for Christ through an ardent spiritual desire - to be united to Him. Consider the 18th century Bishop and Doctor of the Church, St. Alphonsus de Liguori. Many are familiar with His heartfelt prayers concerning our Lord’s Passion. We recite them as we walk beside our Lord in the Stations of the Cross. These compel us to reflect on the depth of His love as we meditate on the sacrifice our Lord endured for us. Liguori’s prayers urge us to recognize our need for the healing that can only come from our Lord. Likewise, Liguori offers a prayer that seeks spiritual communion with Jesus – especially in circumstances which deprive us of receiving Him substantially in Holy Eucharist. Liguori tenderly pleads, “My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my

soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.” Indeed, Jesus encourages us in the very same way that he encouraged the Apostles in the Upper Room: “Ask for whatever you want in My Name and it will be done for you...” Ask for spiritual communion as you watch the Mass on television.

And finally, turn to our Lady. Contemplate Her sorrows and allow Her to lead you to a deeper understanding, a greater wisdom, a more perfect love for Her Son. Mary experienced the anxiety of being separated from Her Son in Her life too. When Jesus was only twelve, she experienced one of the greatest sorrows of Her life when he was lost for three days. And they would be separated again on Good Friday. In both moments, her heart was united to His. We are invited to turn our hearts to Him in the same manner. What’s more, if we let Her, our Blessed Mother will take us by the hand and lead us into the arms of her Son. How, you might ask? Pick up your Rosary and you will be holding her hand. As you move from mystery to mystery, open your heart and your mind to thoughtfully consider how each mystery sheds light on just how much *you are loved*. Pick up your Bible and ask the Holy Spirit to teach you just how much *you are loved*. Watch the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass each day on television. EWTN, in particular, offers many edifying catholic programs to enrich your faith. Review the many edifying programs on FORMED and discover new opportunities for spiritual growth that you may continue to enjoy long after the present crisis subsides.

This present trial will pass and we will be able to attend Holy Mass and receive our Lord in the Eucharist again. On that day, we will have grown in our spiritual lives through our spiritual sacrifices and endeavors during this time in the desert and consequently, we will receive an even greater portion of graces - each time we approach the altar. Until that day, *“be strong and of good courage”* and remember *“all things work for the good – for those who love God.”*

May God Bless you abundantly this day – and every day! – Fr Walsh