

**Thursday, March 19, 2020**

I may soon run out of things to say about the moratorium on publicly celebrated Mass, but not quite yet. Especially on great feasts like today—the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, foster father of the Lord and glorious patron of the Universal Church—people want to worship with Mass, and receive the Lord sacramentally. And yet they are unable. It causes them frustration, and pain. May it also increase love and desire. But another thing to consider is this: while you can't be present at Mass, you are still receiving all the supernatural effects of Mass, other than the sacramental reception itself. It is a dogma of the Church that the Mass is a *sacrifice*. The term “Eucharist,” can mean either the consecrated bread and wine, or the sacred action by which the sacrament is brought about. (And by the way, this is why only priests can be called “Eucharistic ministers” without qualification: laypeople can function as “extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion,” but to be a Eucharistic minister one must have the sacramental power of Holy Orders to confect the sacrament.) And every Mass is a sin offering, benefitting the entire Church, both the living and the dead, because it is the offering of Jesus Christ, our high priest. It is the same sacrifice as Christ's crucifixion on Calvary—for there is only one sacrifice. What Christ offered in a bloody manner on the cross is offered by his ministers in an unbloody manner on altars throughout the world. There are not many sacrifices, but one only. The Mass is the self-same sacrifice, though it sure looks different. What Christ did on Calvary was for sinners, reconciling us to God, and what he continues to do through his ministers is the same. And though you cannot be present, the Masses are for you, all of you, the whole Church and the world, the merits of Christ's passion being shared by all, according to their capacity to receive. When we speak of “the intention of the Mass,” being a particular person, what we mean is the minister's intention, applying the merits in a special way to someone. But Christ's own intention is unchanging: the salvation of the world, and his offering is once for all.

This is what the Council of Trent teaches about Mass as a sacrifice:

*And forasmuch as, in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner, who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy Synod teaches, that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory and that by means of it we obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent, with a sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence. For the Lord, appeased by the oblation thereof, and granting the grace and gift of penitence, forgives even heinous crimes and sins. For the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests, who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different. The fruits indeed of which oblation, of that bloody one to wit, are received most plentifully through this unbloody one; so far is this (latter) from derogating in any way from that (former oblation). Wherefore, not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ, and who are not as yet fully purified, is it rightly offered, agreeably to a tradition of the apostles.*

I have to admit, it feels very strange being a priest and being able to celebrate Mass whenever I want to, while the rest of the Church can't even receive the Eucharist (except those dying, of course). But of course, this is not a luxury. We have to offer Mass; we're not gloating about it. If every priest keeps offering Mass every day, for the Church and the world, things will be far better for everyone than if they stopped out of some false sense of solidarity with other. **The Mass is still for you.** The voice of the Church must still be raised in praise and thanksgiving to God, and be assured that it is, even though you can't gather in church. And if we didn't keep celebrating Mass, the Church would be unfaithful. Perhaps this time will bring also bring about many more priestly vocations! Priests are representatives of the people, offering sacrifice to God on your behalf! And we're still doing that! God be praised!

"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Let Peter's words be ours now, when many can't go to Mass even though they want to. He knows all things; he knows that you love him. He knows you can't go to Mass. But you can still pray, and draw near to him. *God is omnipresent.* And Jesus is still substantially present in the Eucharist, in churches everywhere. You're only a little further away, physically, than you can be in church. He's still there. Those same tabernacles all over the world before the coronavirus are still there, filled with the Lord. Don't stop adoring him just because you can't be without 30 yards of a tabernacle. His grace can span worlds, not to mention feet, yards, and miles.

God is always more than we can manage to fit in our puny heads, and he is present everywhere. So tell him you love him and need his help to carry on and keep your head in a weird time. A happy feast of St. Joseph to all!

Fr. Peter, O.P.