

It has only been one full day so far without public Mass, yet it seems like ages. These are strange days, to be sure. Many (including me) are mystified by the government's and the bishops' blitzkrieg measures. Let us all hope and pray that, in addition to people staying healthy, the economic fallout affecting small family businesses and the poor is minimal. I fear that already a lot of people have had to shutter their businesses and lay people off.

For those wanting to stay close to the Lord and grow in faith during these days without receiving the sacrament—and I hope that is all of us—there are many things to do. Firstly, and most obviously, pray. One of the pitfalls of observing ritual is that we can “outsource” faith to the rituals themselves, or see in the rites of the Church a substitute to faith. This is something that Protestants often say of Catholic worship: that we put our faith in the Church and in outward rituals, whereas they put their faith in God. That is false, but it's understandable, because many Catholics *are* sloppy in the way they give witness to what they believe, and it's always a temptation to see the sacraments as taking care of business for us. Remember how the Old Testament prophets thundered against this attitude: as if God could be bought off by going to the temple, paying for sacrifice, and then going home and continuing to slander, fornicate, and treat your neighbor unjustly. God is not fooled, and he doesn't need sacrifice. We do. It's all for our salvation, not for God's benefit. And the most perfect sacrifice we can offer to God is an obedient and humble heart: that was Christ's offering to the Father. He didn't go kicking and screaming to the Cross, but with the words, *not my will, but thine, be done*.

Christ was obedient, even unto death, death on a Cross. It's the obedience unto death of Christ that saves the world, an obedience that Christ has never withdrawn, even after the ascension: even now he faces the Father in a posture of receptivity and obedience, arms spread wide as if still crucified. He died that we might adopt the same attitude of obedience and humility, and so truly become what he is: the beloved Son. So, the sacraments are not surrogates for faith, but precisely sacraments of faith: they are to help impress on us more deeply the nature of Christ, communicate the divine help we need to fulfill our vocation in the world and reach the Kingdom. They do not substitute for faith: they are fruitful for our salvation only to the extent we have faith (by God's mercy they are fruitful also for those, like infants, who are unable to make their own act of faith).

Faith can endure even during moratoriums on the sacraments: it's been done many times in history, especially in times of persecution. I once heard a wonderful talk about how the Rosary helped preserved the Catholic faith in Ireland and England through

many generations when the Mass was illegal and priests were hanged, drawn, and quartered. I cannot recommend the Rosary highly enough: next to the liturgy, it's probably the most important Catholic prayer there is. And I understand some people say the same thing about the Rosary as about the sacraments: namely, that it's rote, and you can do it without thinking and without love, and that's certainly true, but it's equally true of anything we can do, even our own spontaneous prayer. All prayer is susceptible of becoming rote and perfunctory, and mindless. It's just a fact. So, pray the Rosary. Pray it a lot. Pray it with your family, pray it walking, and driving, when you get up in the morning and before you go to bed at night.

Secondly — and I'll leave it here for today — this could be a marvelous opportunity for Catholics to experience the riches of the Bible. And during this great "fast" from the Eucharist, meditate especially on the so-called institution narratives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and chapter 6 of John's Gospel. Read the Psalms, and Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Saint Paul. Born-again Christians are right about this: Catholics don't know their Bible. That's not the fault of the Catholic Church, but our own laziness. It needn't be so. Let's help remove the reproach by studying and loving the Bible more and more.

I explained yesterday my rationale for not having exposition in church: to minimize the drawing together of crowds. Depending on how things develop and statements from health authorities and the Archdiocese, that might change. I'd love to be able to offer more. Please keep tuned here. The Dominican community are praying for all of you. We know it's especially disorienting to be a faithful Catholic worshipper and all of a sudden deprived of receiving the Eucharist. May this absence make our hearts grow fonder.

--Fr. Peter, O.P.