

Homily May 9-10, 2020 5th Sunday Easter

My brothers and sisters who are watching this, please tell other people about our on-line Masses. Go to our website, or to our YouTube “Saint Lawrence Catholic Church-Indianapolis” Channel. Click the “Subscribe” button and they will send you notices when we have new ones up.

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Archbishop Thompson has published a letter and plan for the gradual reopening of our parish churches. This information is online at archindy.org. In the next several days I will be studying this, asking advice from staff, and listening to the plans of other pastors as decisions are made as to how we will proceed. Thank you for all your prayers.

A few broad items in the announcement include:

Reopening our churches for private prayer and devotions and for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance is possible beginning next Friday for parishes in Marion County.

The offering of weekday Masses and some other smaller celebrations may begin starting Tuesday May 19.

If containment of the pandemic continues, **public celebrations of Sunday Masses MAY resume ON OR AFTER the weekend of May 23 & 24, 2020. Local guidelines direct these to be smaller due to social distancing needs – and some suggestions are that parishes find ways for parishioners to alternate the Sundays they come. I HAVE MADE NO DECISIONS ON THAT YET.**

Also: The dispensation from the obligation to participate at Mass remains in effect until August 15. Those who are 65 years of age and older as well as all vulnerable and sick persons are strongly encouraged to stay at home during this time.

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One more announcement: As we would expect, contributions to Saint Lawrence that would normally come through collections are down everywhere. Our parish has been hit a bit harder than others. Giving is one half of normal.

Thank you for what you can give in order to keep our ministries running.

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Our First Readings on Sundays normally come from the Old Testament. During the Easter Season, they come from The Acts of the Apostles.

Today, we hear of the ordination of the first seven Deacons. Last week I mentioned praying for vocations, especially to the priesthood. Today we can remember to pray for all deacons - and that many more Holy-Spirit-filled men may be open to Christ's call to the diaconate.

In the reading today we find the foundational purpose of the deacon; that of serving those in need, the care of the neglected. This is so basic a purpose that - upon reflection - it is no wonder that those who are ordained as priests and bishops come from those already serving as deacons. We do not want to hear words of wisdom preached if those words are not grounded in a heart wounded by the wounds of others.

Service – care for all those in need – is part of the basic biblical understanding of justice. Power exists not to impose on others, but to see to the needs of others.

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It is a fortunate coincidence that we hear these words regarding loving service on this weekend, when here in the United States it is Mother's Day weekend. Mothers and fathers have a lot of authority over their children when they are young. And that authority and all their capabilities are put to the care and raising of their children. That is an awe-inspiring purpose. And it is frightening responsibility. On Mother's Day, and later on Father's Day, we recognize and appreciate their efforts.

More than that, we remember that the Fourth Commandment (to Honor Father and Mother) is not directed so much to us in our first ten years of life. It is a command for our adulthood. We are to care for our parents when they need it as they get older and we are the ones who now have strength and vitality to serve of them.

Like the job of the deacons in the First Reading today. Service is nothing new in Christianity but is part of the very fabric of God's church.

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Mother's day also reminds us of home, and of our parents providing a safe and loving home. And that gives us a link to another reading we have today, the Gospel reading.

Christ tells us today that he is, "going to prepare a place" for us. This is an important point. Bishop Mueggenborg from Seattle Washington says this about Our Lord's promise:

"The power of this statement cannot be underestimated. We oftentimes think of this statement as referring to a place in heaven...However, we need to remember that throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has been stressing the relationship He has with the Father in terms of "abiding" or "dwelling"...what the Lord is really saying is that He will open to us the relationship He has with the Father so that we can share in it just as He shares in it. The place Jesus prepares for us in this passage, then, is about relationship, not location. It is about being given a part in a permanent life-giving relationship with God that allows us to experience heaven on earth through the indwelling Spirit of God in us. It is about accepting the gift of God's life in us and responding to that divine initiative by offering our lives to God in return. Through Jesus, we now have a "place" in that divine relationship because He has opened that indwelling presence to us."

Or, as we remember Jesus saying from our gospel passage last week, He came that we might have life, and have it in abundance.

This is good to remember during this time when we are feeling especially burdened with separation and possible life-threatening illness. To quote Bishop Mueggenborg again:

"When [Our Lord] uses the word "troubled", He uses a word that expresses the trepidation a person experiences when confronted with the power of evil and death. Thus, He is saying to the disciples that they must stand firm even when it looks like evil and death have control over a situation. It is really a rallying cry for strength, confidence, courage, and perseverance in the face of such trials. Sometimes we need to be reminded to "let not our hearts be troubled" when we encounter seemingly hopeless situations."

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Finally, in our gospel today, Christ tells us to believe Him, or at least believe His works. He then goes on to assure us that if we believe in Him, we will do greater works.

Believe Him. Believe His works. And we do greater works.

This takes us back to loving service and to dwelling in the abundant life in the Trinity. It should somehow show.

Are we believable? Do our lives make people ask where we get our confidence and love? Do they want what we have?

It is through the witness of lives consistent with our words that many people have come to Christ. Many Christians have change from one denomination to another based on that simple thing – that even if they can unceasingly argue points of doctrine – they see love in the lives of the other person they disagree with.

Do people see abundant life in us? Do they see truth and direction and service and goodness in us?

Are we believable?