

## **Breathing With Two Lungs, Eucharist and Mary:**

The changes that have occurred in the last two months have impacted so many people around the world and in so many aspects of our lives. The epidemic of Coronavirus has started about three months ago, yet its effect feels as though it has been many long years.

In three months, thousands of souls have died. Millions have been afflicted by this disease, many physically and many more emotionally, spiritually, economically, etc. Many people have said of that what they have lived recently: it's something that they would never have imagined in their lifetime.

Spiritually, for millions of devout Catholics, they have never imagined themselves without Masses in general, and more so in this holiest season of the year. Though mentally people understand to some extent the suspension of all the Masses, yet spiritually it's even much harder for people to imagine their Easter celebration without going to the Church as a family and to participate in the sacred Triduum. Without a doubt, the technology of the time we live in has been helpful for people to watch televised Masses and other spiritual devotions. At the same time, such resources are still a challenge for many because the Holy Mass for us is not a religious celebration or spiritual gathering, but rather it is a participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

The challenges of the past few months, the struggle of the present times, and the uncertainty of the future has "rocked" the boat of our lives. We wake up every morning not knowing what to expect. So much bad news everywhere, cancellation of schools, loss of jobs, stay-home orders, etc. It feels like the boat of each one of us has been tossed in the ocean of this turmoil called Coronavirus.

Contemplating on what I hear every day from people who ask for prayers, seek for help, or long for an answer/solution, I found myself remembering the prophetic vision of Saint John Bosco of the two pillars that he witnessed in a very stormy seashore. In his vision, Saint John Bosco saw the Church in the shape of a big ship, attacked by other ships of the enemy around it. The high waves were rocking the big ship in so many directions. In that moment Saint John Bosco said that he saw ***"in the midst of this endless sea, two solid columns, a short distance apart, soar high into the sky; one is surmounted by a statue of the Immaculate Virgin and the other, far loftier and sturdier, supports a [Communion] Sacred Host."***

Reaching out to many of our Catholic people and hearing about how they try to navigate the boat of their lives in the midst of the storm, I felt the prophetic vision of Saint John Bosco became alive in the hearts and lives of these people. Many see their daily Rosary as an anchor to help them be grounded near the running stream of Jesus, for no one knows Him like His Holy Mother. It was so inspiring to read on the news how the Bishops of more than 20 countries consecrated and entrusted their people to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Heart on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25<sup>th</sup>. One of the most profound experiences for me personally in the midst of all this tsunami of death, suffering, pain, fear, panic, etc., is to watch and witness the faith of people in the Holy Eucharist. It is so moving to hear people experiencing interior pain from missing the Holy Eucharist because Masses have been suspended.

In our own neighborhood, our community is blessed to be able to host daily Adoration with the permission of our Archdiocese and the pastor of our neighboring parish. Since two weeks ago, we have had Adoration seven hours, seven days a week. We try to keep vigilant in terms of hygiene of the pews, prayer books, kneelers, etc. We offer sanitizers for hands and pews. We try to watch the number of people for every given hour to honor the directive instruction of our Archdiocese and local government. One of the things that Saint Francis of Assisi said, ***“It is in giving that we receive.”*** Often people thank our community for keeping vigil with the Blessed Sacrament exposed every day for seven hours and make this vigil time an opportunity for the public to come and be with the Lord.

I have seen in the last two weeks throughout the hours of Adoration people of different walks of life, from government officials to homeless, older generations to toddlers, men and women of different ethnic backgrounds, etc. They all come, day after day, in these “cold” days of social distancing, isolation, separation...they come to seek the warmth of the Divine Furnace present on the Altar. Some come to stay for hours, others stop by as their schedule permits. At the same time for all of them, this time of Adoration has become like a piece of Heaven. Witnessing an African mother with her little toddler kneeling so close to the Altar to gaze on Jesus, watching a daughter bringing her frail Irish father pushing his walker despite his weak eye sight, trying to get as close as possible to gaze upon Him Who is there gazing upon His children, looking at married couples holding tightly on their Rosaries in Adoration, and very wrinkly fingers of an elderly woman moving from one bead to the other, seeing a postman and a construction worker running into the Church, though for a brief visit, to receive the peace and blessings that comes from God alone, are among many profound, moving moments of the faith of our people who come to the Blessed Mother, who come to Jesus.

There are many moments each day we all feel searching for the fresh air to breathe, when we feel the “air of our life” has been polluted by the tragedies of the pandemic of Coronavirus. I see our faithful coming to the Church to pray to Jesus with their Holy Mother as if the Holy Eucharist and the assurance of the Virgin Mary’s maternal love has become like the two lungs for the faithful to breathe with to help us inflame the torch of our faith and hope in these trying times.