

30th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 10:46-52

Throughout these months of the churches being closed, Holy Cross Parish persevered untiringly.

As we have always done throughout this pandemic, we have worked hard and creatively and so on the day the stay-at-home orders were announced, with only a few hours notice, provision was very quickly made for additional Masses following 4:30 p.m. at 5:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. so that as many people as possible could attend Mass before the lockdown.

Just as we did last year when they said we could have only 100 people in a church, we arranged for extra Masses. And people came along. They said if you have more than 100 people you must go outside. So we did. And people came along. They said we're closing your churches. So we took our faith to our homes and we showed that whatever you take away from us you will not take away our faith.

And we did it again this year. We showed that our faith is not bound by the things of this world, but finds its life by the grace of almighty God and the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. We found ways to keep on going, and our parishioners, and parishioners from many other parishes, joined us and found a way to continue to practice the faith and to give a sense of hope to the world.

The Church has always entrusted herself to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary in times of trial. In the year 590, as Rome suffered a terrible plague, Pope Gregory the Great processed through the streets in prayer, carrying an image of Our Lady praying for protection and an end to the epidemic.

1,400 years later, we continued this noble tradition with our parish's "Perimeter of Prayer". I travelled to the boundaries of the parish to bless the borders, sprinkling them with holy water and praying to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Divine Love, for the protection of our parish.

With this, we asked all households to join us and to place the icon of Our Lady of Divine Love in the windows of your homes and to pray daily the prayer of to Our Lady of Divine Love to protect the world during the coronavirus pandemic.

To continue this "Perimeter of Prayer, we had daily Mass on our Facebook page and our YouTube channel which allowed parishioners to continue to hear the Sacrifice of the Mass, to pray with the Church, and to see the church. And for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we found ways to celebrate these days with solemnity and to give honour to Our Blessed Mother and on our parish's feast day.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was live-streamed each day so that we could continue to worship and adore Our Lord and to seek for His grace and mercy.

There was the Holy Rosary every evening, as well as many times when we prayed the Rosary together by Zoom, with parishioners leading the decades.

We asked people to join in our "Walk 4 Mary", asking parishioners to pray a decade of the Rosary whenever outside for a walk, and we placed the icon of Our Lady of Divine Love in the pews of the churches with the names of all families who joined us in this.

As we celebrated the Month of the Holy Cross, parishioners joined in recording the novena of the Holy Cross. And again, parishioners recorded the Stations of the Cross so that we could pray these together as a parish. And for some fun, we organised an online Trivia Night to celebrate the close of Holy Cross Month.

With the schools, we had a weekly community prayer so that staff, students and parents could find ways to pray together. And we also invited the students of our schools and the children of our parish to send us their drawings and colouring-in pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary or to write prayers for us to pray.

We invited parishioners to send us their prayer requests so that we could share these with the parish and so that we could continue to support one another in prayer.

And not only did we find many ways to continue our spiritual life, but our mental health and physical well-being with “Holy Cross Connects.”

We asked families to send video messages to the parish to encourage us and to tell us what they were doing through the lockdown, which we called “Holy Cross Families”.

Our parish youth group, Holy Cross Youth, prepared our “Saints of the Holy Cross” spotlighting those Saints who have an affiliation with the Cross.

We also continued our St. Joseph’s Table in honour of the Year of St. Joseph. With the generosity of parishioners, we were able to continue to provide groceries and other household items to families in need of support through this time.

In other ways, parishioners contributed to the life of the parish by looking after the grounds, cleaning the churches, preparing the piety shops, and looking after the parish bus.

And many parishioners generously continued to give in support of the parish, either by dropping off their envelopes or making online donations or by preparing their envelopes week by week in readiness for the churches opening.

While many other places shut down, we did not. We forged ahead in faith and hope and found ways to keep it all going.

Whilst most of the attention was on physical health and making sure that people were kept safe bodily, we were concerned with spiritual health and making sure that people’s souls were kept safe. For as Our Lord said, what does it profit us to gain the whole world but to lose our very selves (cf. Lk 9:25)?

The holy sacrifice of the Mass is the source and summit of our faith. It is to this that we look and from this that we find our life. The devotions, the prayers, the catechesis, the good works that we shared in these past few months were all the means to strengthen our souls, to give voice to our faith, to give encouragement and so hope. By these we found ways to keep on going. But from the beginning of this all, we said we wanted to be a sign of hope and faith, and so we sought ways to engage with our faith and with the community so that people could participate, in some way, in the worship of God, in the expression of the faith. We found ways to continue to celebrate the faith and the life of the parish. It has been a struggle but it has given us all the chance to make a choice

for ourselves—whether or not we persevere in a life of faith. Whether we share in the perseverance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom so much was promised yet suffered so much.

Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Divine Love, pray for us.