

**INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST
SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART**

Nihil operi Dei praeponatur.

Let nothing come before the Work of God.

St. Benedict, Rule Chap. 43

March 21, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the Society of the Sacred Heart,

As the Roman Martyrology records for us, today is the very day on which our glorious patron St. Benedict was born into eternal life. Thus it was Providence that ordained from all eternity that his feast should fall during Lent. The Roman liturgy has always permitted feasts to be kept during Lent, even though their celebration would traditionally not be allowed entirely to interrupt the fasting and abstinence of the season. Feasts in Lent always took on a penitential character so as not to overshadow the mystery of Our Savior's Passion and death. For most of us, however, St. Benedict's feast this year assumes a penitential tone none of us would have expected, for if we are not without good food and drink, we are deprived of the solemn liturgy.

Like many of you in this age when information spreads so fast, I was struck today by the timely words of His Eminence Cardinal Burke in his piece today entitled, *Message on the Combat against the Coronavirus, COVID-19*:

In considering what is needed to live, we must not forget that our first consideration is our relationship with God. We recall the words of Our Lord in the Gospel according to John: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we come to him and make our home with him" (14, 23). Christ is the Lord of nature and of history. He is not distant and disinterested in us and the world. He has promised us: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28, 20). In combatting the evil of the coronavirus, our most effective weapon is, therefore, our relationship with Christ through prayer and penance, and devotions and sacred worship. We turn to Christ to deliver us from pestilence and from all harm, and He never fails to respond with pure and selfless love. That is why it is essential for us, at all times and above all in times of crisis, to have access to our churches and chapels, to the Sacraments, and to public devotions and prayers.

In the face of an unknown and terrifying menace, the Catholic hierarchy and faithful throughout the world have tried to respond with prudence and consideration for their fellow man and for the common good. It is in this spirit that we have hitherto accepted restrictions on the exercise of our holy religion that Diocletian himself, in the full fever of Roman persecution, would never have dreamed possible. What is particularly unnerving to so many of us is the manner in which the pure flame of worship has gone out: not with a bang, but with a whimper. As yet we have seen neither rack nor rope; we are met not so much with persecution as with incomprehension, not so much with malice as with oblivion. We are not fiercely attacked as an enemy of the State; we are carelessly sidelined as an "unnecessary service". An unnecessary service! What words could be more odious, indeed blasphemous, to the ears of our holy patron whom we celebrate today, whose solemn injunction thunders down through the ages as the veritable linchpin of civilization: *nihil operi Dei praeponatur!* The sacred liturgy of the Church of Christ is the most necessary service! O poor, uncomprehending world! We do not wish to condemn our fellow man, all those who are so far from the light of faith, for now is the time of mercy. Yet if Our Lord saw fit to chide Martha, that woman of great faith whom He loved so dearly, surely we can imitate His example in saying gently to our unbelieving neighbor: *you are anxious and troubled about many things; but one thing is necessary*. God bless and defend the millions of heroic souls who are battling now for the lives of the plague-stricken! This is the Church's battle as well; let none of us shrink at this dark hour from performing the corporal works of mercy! Nevertheless, it is Bride of Christ who *has*

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chosen the best part, which shall not be taken from her (Lk 10:41-42). We must teach the pagan world that, yes, we are body and soul, but we are soul before body.

Freedom of religion is not man's right to believe whatever he wishes; it is God's right to be worshipped in the way He has ordained. He tells us He is a *jealous God* (Ex. 20:5): jealous for His glory, and jealous in His love for us. The twofold purpose of the sacred liturgy is the glory of God and the sanctification of man. Neither of these ends can be met by mere human efforts; that is why, despite the etymology of the Greek word *leitourgia* ("service of the people") St. Benedict refers to the liturgy not as the work of man, but as the Work of God. When divine worship is suppressed, it is God's work in the world that is thwarted, and charity can no longer be poured forth; when we say we will not have Christ to reign over us, there is only one other Prince who can. When we spurn the liturgy, when we refuse to bend the knee at that Name above all names, we reject Christ as our King here and now, and shall have Him only as our Judge at the end.

What a strange Laetare Sunday this will be for all of us. The chants of the Mass take on a new, haunting sound, for they speak of the joy of entering God's house. They were intended ages ago for the catechumens about to be received into the fold, or for penitents about to be reconciled to their Mother. This year, we must find our solace in the Gospel. The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists. Its most sublime telling is the one we hear this Sunday, by St. John, for he places this miracle immediately before Our Savior's discourse on the Bread of Life, the promise of the Holy Eucharist. The Beloved Disciple tells us that the crowd follows Jesus *because they saw the signs He did on those who were diseased* (Jn. 6:2). St. Mark adds that Our Lord *had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd*; yet His disciples protest, *This is a lonely place, and the hour is late; send them away*. But their Master responds, *You give them something to eat* (Mk. 6:35-37).

Please continue to pray for all of us priests that we may continue to minister to you as we traverse together this lonely place. We rejoice in our tribulations! For Our Lord has not abandoned us; if we are far from His house, He feeds us in the field. The hour is late, but the Lion of Judah is on the move. Sickness and death can never separate us from the love of Christ! They are but a long night's fever that ushers in that glorious morning when we shall at last pour forth the Laetare chant: *I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord*.

Sincerely Yours in His Most Sacred Heart,

Canon Aaron B. Huberfeld
National Chaplain