

- With the restrictions on the Latin Mass coming to fruition this week, our parish has closed one chapter of its life and begun another.
- Many thanks to all of you who attended our final Latin Mass this past Wednesday. I'd also like to express my gratitude for all of you who have been praying for Fr. Jones and me. We are very grateful for your support, prayers, and encouragement.
- As we begin a new chapter in our parish, my encouragement to you is to remember who we are: we are faithful sons and daughters of the Most High God. We are His beloved children.
- Therefore, we must have faith, confident that our Lord is very much in control of all that is going on with our parish, with our diocese, and with the entire Universal Church.
- When life changes in a major way or moments of pain or suffering come, our Lord wants us to have faith in His goodness. He wants us to trust in His providence, and to believe with all our hearts that He will bring something good out of whatever pain He allows to befall us.
- Think about what our Lord says to us today about faith. He says: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." In other words, a little faith goes a long way!
- And faith is powerful! When God sees our faith, He is moved by it, and He responds to it with generosity.
- To be sure, suffering with faith, hope, and love never goes unnoticed by our Lord. He rewards it richly. God rejoices when He sees His creatures making an act of the will to trust Him, to hope in Him, and to love Him – most especially in the midst of suffering.
- While we cannot always control the circumstances and events that shape our lives, we can choose how we will respond. We can choose to live in faith, even when we don't understand why God is allowing something painful to happen.
- This is exactly why St. Paul encourages us in our epistle to "Stir into flame the gift of God," reminding us that God "did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control." It's why he encourages us to bear our share of hardship for the Gospel.
- Think about these words for a moment: God has given us something that He wishes us to put into use. What has He given us? He's given us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity – what we call the theological virtues, which were infused within our souls at baptism.
- These three virtues are supernatural gifts from God. He gives us these gifts at the very beginning of our Christian lives so that might believe in God, hope in Him as our greatest and final good, and love Him above all else and our neighbors as ourselves.
- In other words, these three virtues are the very building blocks – the foundation – of Christian discipleship. With these virtues we share in God's divine nature and learn to aspire for eternal life with our Lord in Heaven.
- Without them, we are not properly equipped to get into Heaven. This is precisely why as Catholics we baptize our children as soon after birth as we can.
- Baptism for us is less about a person making an act of the will to choose to serve God as a disciple (as many Protestants believe), but more about being adopted God as one of His children, and thereby receiving His sanctifying grace, which makes us one with Him.
- These virtues of faith, hope, and charity that we must "stir into flame" as St. Paul puts it, are not earned by us. Rather they are given to us in "seedling" form and must be nurtured and developed through prayer, the sacraments, and the living out the Church's teachings.

- Yet, at times our faith, hope, and charity can feel fragile and ephemeral. Even the saints struggled at times. Just look at the apostles in the Gospel today. The apostles say to the Lord: “Increase our faith” – obviously because their faith in Christ has been challenged.
- How many times have we all prayed this ourselves? How many times have we asked, “Lord, give me more faith or “Lord, please strengthen my faith”? And we say the same with the virtue of charity, too, don’t we?
- And yet how many times have we really done our part to increase the faith, hope, and charity that God has given us? Have we ever made a firm act of the will to be confident in our Lord and to really trust him?
- Remember: faith, hope, and charity are virtues; they are not feelings. They’re divine gifts infused in us by God, gifts nurtured by the sacraments and by participation in the liturgy. They’re increased through prayer, our practice of the Faith, and the good examples of others.
- However, the virtues require tending to, for they are the muscles of our soul. And if we want these virtues to grow strong within us, we have to exercise these muscles of our soul.
- We exercise the virtues by putting them into practice. In other words, we exercise faith by making the choice to trust God. We exercise hope by looking to God as our final good and desiring Him above all else. We exercise charity by doing charitable things.
- But here’s the rub: the virtues are often best exercised through adversity. Truly, it’s when we encounter those difficult moments in life – and we all have them from time to time – that our faith, our hope, and our charity are most likely to increase!
- This is why so many saints speak of suffering as a great gift: because suffering affords an opportunity to grow in faith, hope, and charity.
- The problem is that our sufferings are often exacerbated by the feeling that God isn’t listening to our prayers. Sometimes when we ask God to take away a suffering, He tells us no. But He tells us no because He loves us and wants us to persevere through our suffering.
- As I’ve said so often, suffering – in whatever form it comes to us – is always an invitation to trust God more deeply. It’s not a sign that He’s ignoring us or necessarily punishing us. No, suffering is God’s way of gracing us with an opportunity to become holier.
- The great thing is that God is here to help us in our time of trial. Think again about the words of the second reading we heard today: “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather of power and love and self-control.”
- You see, God never abandons us! Even in the most difficult and trying times of our life – when we feel the most alone and isolated – God is giving us the grace and courage we need to persevere in whatever dark night we may find ourselves.
- And when we trust in this, when we choose to believe that God loves us more than we can imagine, our faith increases – as do our hope and our charity.
- My brothers and sisters, God has given us all the tools we need to be holy and prepare ourselves well for Heaven through the gifts of faith, hope, and charity. Every time suffering comes into our lives, we are given the perfect opportunity to strengthen these virtues.
- If you’re suffering in some way now, trust in God’s grace and exercise your faith, hope, and charity with great confidence, knowing that these virtues will increase within you and eventually lead you to eternal life.
- And as a parish community, let us have absolute trust that this next chapter in our parish’s life will be filled with God’s grace, mercy, and joy.