

Fr. Luan Tran

Weekly Bulletin Notes

2020

January 5, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I quoted the nihilistic philosopher Jean Paul Sartre's words in my homily last week that "Hell is other people." On Thursday, there was an article in the Post by Mr. Arthur C. Brooks of the AEI, who corrected Sartre with his own definition of hell: "Hell is the lack of other people!" I couldn't agree more. Hell, existentially speaking, is the same thing as loneliness and isolation and abandonment. Hell is the experience of a total absence of the experience of being loved by somebody else. Here in America, hell is a true reality for many of us.

In thinking about this endemic of loneliness rampant in this most affluent society of the West, I want to propose an idea: why don't we do something about this? Societal changes start with individuals. Each one of us can do something about this problem within our own spheres of influence. We can make the world a less lonely place if each of us would decide to chisel away at the wall of isolation - one conversation with one stranger at a time. Let's embrace the idea that, instead of allowing ourselves to be absorbed in our cell phones, we should engage another human being in conversation. Let's not use our cell phones as a barrier to protect ourselves from possible awkwardness or intrusion, but be courageous in daring to step outside of ourselves and invite a fellow human being into a genuine conversation. Be not afraid of strangers, but let's look at the people whom we meet as an opportunity to discover the hidden face of Christ! Let's put away the cell phone as much as we can, so that we have more time to interact with real people, whose life stories may matter a lot more than some email messages from the office!

The Gospel is preached most effectively within the context of a friendship. May the New Evangelization begin in earnest with each one of us, whose heart's affection reaches out to the stranger on the street because of our shared humanity and our common destiny!

January 12, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The recent events between our country and Iran demonstrate how precarious world peace is. If anything, there are always simmering tensions kept under a lid until something triggers the explosion. Peace is what we desperately need but can't have because of our human condition. But actually there is Peace! Our Lord has said, "Peace I leave to you. My peace I give to you!" The Peace that we truly need is not the "political peace" that comes and goes, that depends on the superpowers of the moment. The Peace we need is from the Lord - the Prince of Peace. It comes from the knowledge that we are never left on our own to fend for ourselves, but He is always near us to protect us, to keep us from harm, to give us hope and reasons to go on. The Peace without which we cannot live is the Peace that comes from the knowledge that we belong to Him and we live and move and have our being from Him and in Him, and that not even a hair of our head could fall to the ground without Him knowing it! The Peace that sustains us comes from our companionship with Him, who is ever awake and ever walking alongside with us in all circumstances of life. Through the Sacraments, through daily prayers, through our constant conversations with Him, through the three Theological virtues of

Faith, Hope, and Charity, Peace remains inside us and gives assurances that nothing, absolutely nothing, can destroy us. I will leave you with this quote from Roman 8, and I pray that you meditate on it!

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

January 19, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Many of you have noticed I have had difficulties walking during Mass. It's because I had fallen several times in November and December. My new physical handicaps have given me a new perspective: I now realize most in a most profound personally how everything could change in an instant, and that I am healthy until I am no longer so. I know, it's a tautology, but it is true!

For now, I am coping with my disability through different means. But what has been most helpful to me is the recognition that I could offer up my little suffering for the sake of others. I am looking at my new situation with an awareness that I must slow down and take life in stride - not having to be always in a hurry! I also appreciate the suffering of others who have mobility problems. I am learning to empathize with them. Everything we have and are have been given to us by the good God. I am thankful to Him for being alive! I also thank you for having put up with me.

God bless you!

January 26, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The Archbishop's Catholic Appeal will be here in two weeks. This year the focus is on support for the retired priests of the Archdiocese. There are currently over 60 retired priests being supported by this local Church. The Archbishop prefers to call them Priests on "senior status." That is actually better than the designation "retired," for most of them are still actively engaged in ministry. Their support constitutes the largest chunk of the money raised from the annual Archbishop's Catholic Appeal – it costs a lot of money to provide for a priest on senior status. But that is the one obligation the Archbishop undertakes gladly and seriously. And he needs our help! These retired priests served the Church faithfully for many years, and now in their golden years, when their health is declining, we, as the local Church, must care for them. I am thinking of Fathers Cunniff, a bombardier of WWII, who is approaching 100 hundred years of age! I am thinking of Msgr. Don Buxman, the former Vicar for Clergy who also taught many of us at the seminary. I am also thinking of Archbishop Vlazny and Bishop Steiner, both of whom many of you still remember! Archbishop Vlazny saved the Archdiocese from bankruptcy by seeking protection from the Federal Court and he spearheaded the efforts to re-organize all the parishes. Bishop Steiner was ubiquitous in his presence with the people of Western Oregon. He cares a great deal for the retired clergy. He never turns down a request for a funeral Mass if he could do it! And Msgr. Tim Murphy of Central Catholic fame! And Msgr. O'Donovan, the former Vicar General, who walked with us through thick

and thin and whose presence was reassuring when we priests did not have a clue as to our future in those difficult times. The mere recalling of their names and their faces could bring a wave of affection into our souls!

Please consider participate in this year's Appeal to assist the Archbishop in caring for these great priests!

February 9, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

In a few weeks, the Ordinary Time after Christmas will end and we will enter the great Penitential Season of Lent. Please consider ways to make your Lenten observance this year meaningful so that you may be ready to welcome Easter with great joy! One of the ways is to go to confession at the first opportunity so your heart and your conscience may be cleansed of all the things that might stand in the way of a proper discernment about a spiritual program for this Lent!

Please also consider doing something extra this year - perhaps fasting! I shall speak more about fasting in due time! Maybe you could take up a particularly inspiring book to read! I might suggest a few titles later. Maybe you could join me and others in making the Way of the Cross every Friday! Or some extra charitable deeds! Whatever it is that helps you to prepare for the great Feast and Season of Easter, please consider. Every year, my recurring regret is that my Lenten observance season has come and gone without much benefit to my soul! Hopefully this year this won't happen to any of us!

God bless you!

February 16, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Pope Francis just issued his post-synodal apostolic exhortation titled "*Querida Amazonia*." This document is an official response by the Holy Father to the participants in October 2019's Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon, *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*. It is also addressed to the whole Church. In it, the pope did not mention celibacy nor did he accept the recommendation that women be considered for ordination to the diaconate. The pope also talked about the four dreams he has for the region. But first and foremost he is concerned with the spiritual welfare of the people of God in that remote area of the world. He is very concerned that people may not have access to the Holy Eucharist. And He proposes a very sound solution: he asks that bishops pray for and encourage more vocations and that Catholic people be inspired to offer their service as missionaries to the region. And he entrusts everyone and everything to the Blessed Mother. One thing that struck me, the task of proclaiming the Gospel is not reserved exclusively to the clergy but the lay faithful have also a large role in it.

Today, we pray for the intentions of the Holy Father for the Amazonian region and for its people!

February 23, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

My homily last week received some positive feedbacks and I am grateful for them! No, I don't base my happiness upon people's positive input, and yet I do appreciate very much your kindness! Really, it is affirming to be told that what I say might have a small impact on how you think about God and eternity. My more basic point is this: I hope and pray

that my homily may help you look inward and come to the realization, as I do, that God is real, that the Catholic Church is truly the bulwark of salvation, that there is hope for you and for me, and that life is ultimately worthwhile.

The one theme that runs through all my homilies is this: my faith must be verified through my daily experiences; otherwise, faith is pretty much “chuckable!” If faith is not verified through moments of daily living, if faith is not affirmed through my encounter with reality and people and events and happenings, then faith is useless. But as it is, faith is indeed always and everywhere verified for those whose eyes are open and whose hearts are awakened to the call of the One who has made us and continues to generate us - even now.

Lent is coming! God has seen fit to grant us another season of grace in which to clear our hearts and souls of all the things that clutter up our interior space and crowd out the graces of heaven and drown out the voice of eternity. If we take Lent seriously, we shall discover, once again, how faith is truly the stuff that makes life brimming with the joy of our youth and keeps us excited every Monday morning, and motivates us to put one foot in front of the other in order to keep on keeping on!

March 1, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The following comes from one of my old homilies and I think it's good to share it with you. I can't say all the ideas in this paragraph were mine. I think I might have had incorporated some of them from other sources I had come across previously. Anyway, I think it's beneficial!

"The three practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving that Christ teaches us and which we make a central focus each Lent are wonderful tools to help us as we seek to enter our own spiritual desert this Lent. But the more difficult thing among these three practices is this business of fasting. For instance, how hard is it to say a few more prayer, to give an extra dollar or two to charity. On the other hand, fasting and denying ourselves of our favorite foods and things seem a bit more complicated and cumbersome - no? Truth is, fasting or going without is more difficult than one could imagine! Lately, many priests and spiritual writers have discouraged this practice of self-denial and advocate doing something more positive. But the Lent is incomplete unless it involves some forms of disciplining of the unruly body. Sometimes these can seem trivial things, like tea or coffee or cakes or sweets, tokens of abstinence. Yet, by the things and the small pleasures that we give up, we discover our weaknesses. Giving up things, even little things such as our favorite snacks, clarifies for us what our life is really dependent on. As the weeks go by, we come to realize how much we miss them and how dependent we are on them. We come to realize how important a role they play in our lives. We come to grips with the reality that we have used those “creature comforts” to manage and cope with the stresses and strains of life. But if we persevere by the grace of God, by the end of Lent, we find that not one we have survived without those things we have given up, we might have become liberated from them and we feel much better for it. So, giving up things for Lent can teach us much about our true dependency on God. We learn that the fewer attachments to this life we have, the freer we are for the things that pertain to our true destiny.”

March 22, 2020 Bulletin: My Dearest Parishioners,

With a heavy heart I am writing you on this Wednesday, the third day into a new regime of shutdowns and cancellations! Although all public Masses are now forbidden until after Easter Sunday, Holy Mass is being celebrated daily at our parish church to offer worship to Almighty God and to pray for the welfare of our people – your families. It is truly a pain for a parish priest, such as I, to see for the first time how his beloved parish church is now silent with empty rows upon empty rows. But the Holy Mass and the Sacraments are for the people, and, although you are not present, I am celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in communion with all of you and for you, even as I am in communion with the saints and the Angels! The strength of our bonds is not merely emotional, but based on the reality of our sharing in the Communion of Saints and our common membership in the Body of Christ! And so, out of sight, out of mind? NOT! You are in my thoughts and my prayers – daily!

March 29, 2020 Bulletin: My Dearest Parishioners,

There is a saying, "Out of sight, out of mind!" I beg to differ! You may not be here at the church in person, but you all are in my thoughts and my prayers – daily!

I would like to invite you to stop by the church and make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. You could also make the Way of the Cross, or pray the Rosary, or recite the Divine Mercy Chaplet, while you tarry in the presence of our Blessed Lord in the Tabernacle. The church will stay open basically between 10am – 3pm daily (please use side door opposite the Adoration Chapel). Please observe the six-foot rule inside the church. More than ever before, now is the time for us to be especially close to our Blessed Lord and be rooted in Him! Whatever the government might deem essential, for Christians, the essentials must include, first and foremost, a deep and abiding relationship with God – a relationship that generates life. But that relationship must be nurtured and guarded by prayers and the Sacraments. In the absence of Sunday Mass in the life of a Catholic, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the most profound way to stay connected to the Sacrifice of the Mass. At the same time, prayers and devotions keep alive that hunger for the Eucharist.

Until we see each other again, May God bless you and keep you! May God show His Countenance upon you!

Holy Mary, Mother of God - pray for us! St. Joseph - pray for us! St. Agatha's - pray for us!

April 5, 2020 Bulletin: Dearest Parishioners and visitors to our website:

I have here the best advice that might save your biological life from a remarkable doctor working at the epicenter of the coronavirus plague in New York City, Dr. David Price, a Fellow of Pulmonology at the famous hospital Weill Cornell Medical Center:

"COVID-19 is transmitted primarily from the hands to the face. So be aware of your hands at all times. Keep them clean by washing often and using hand sanitizer. DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE! If you're sick or vulnerable, isolate yourself. In order to prevent overwhelming our health care system, go to the hospital only if you're short of breath. Maintain social distancing. Feel free to use a face mask, primarily to train yourself to NOT TO TOUCH YOUR FACE. But aerosolized transmission is far less common, so you don't need an N95 face mask. Reserve those for front-line health care workers."

Let me add this prayer as we are also struggling mightily with spiritual darkness in these times: "O my Blessed Mother, ask our Good God to give us just enough petrol to make it home, so that we might not be stranded here in this stretch of no-man land, where no one would come to our rescue! Amen!"

April 12, 2020 Bulletin: My Dearest Parishioners,

Today is Good Friday! Author Carl Olson has this beautiful summary of Good Friday: "This is the first full day of the Easter Triduum, a day commemorating the Passion, Cross, and death of Jesus Christ, and therefore a day of strict fasting. The liturgy is profoundly austere, perhaps the most simple and stark liturgy of the entire year. The liturgy of the Lord's Passion consists of three parts: the liturgy of the Word, the veneration of the Cross, and the reception of Communion. Although Communion is given and received, this liturgy is not a Mass; this practice dates back to the earliest years of the Church and is meant to emphasize the somber, mournful character of the day. The Body of Christ that is received by the faithful on Good Friday was consecrated the prior evening at the Mass of the Lord's Supper and, in most cases, was adored until midnight or another late hour."

I invite you to visit the church today and spend some time with our Lord. The Blessed Sacrament is not in its usual place but is being kept in the sacristy. Please come and keep watch with Him - especially now! We can wait until Easter Sunday! Everyday seems to be Good Friday now during the shutdown, but God is not dead and He is here among us! The reason we could get up in the morning is because Christ is risen. Death will not have the last say. Illness and diseases and loneliness will not have the last say. Our destiny is contained and indicated in the Easter Mystery!

April 19, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear People,

By now we have discovered how ruinous this current plague has been for our country, our economy, our way of life. What a relentless destructive scourge on the human race! The question that has been on my mind: is this plague a form of divine punishment? Absolutely not! For one thing, God does not mete out punishment in the way we think He should, based on human logic. Our good God does not use punishment in order to put the fear of Him in the human heart. That is not how He operates! For another thing, God does not punish the innocent for the sins of the wicked. The divine permissive Will may allow something bad to happen, but that is not the same as saying that God is actively and personally causing evils and sufferings in the world.

Perhaps it may be more profitable to look at things from a different perspective! From Isaiah 43: "***I am doing something new, and don't you perceive it?***" Yes, perhaps what we are experiencing right now – collectively and individually, is the beginning of something new God is accomplishing in the world! Right now something new is happening to me: I am experiencing a new appreciation for you, my people! A month of private Masses and empty pews: I am now longing for the day when we shall be back together, priest and people, shepherd and sheep – all under the loving gaze of our Good Shepherd! This a feeling I have never had! I have begun to appreciate what a beautiful thing it is when a priest is able to interact, relate, and converse with his people in the normal course of daily life. The people whom God has put in a priest's charge, they are really the reason why a priest would get up in the morning to say Mass when it's cold and

dreary outside and every bone in his body is aching! Without people, the priest senses his loneliness and his isolation most acutely – he needs to see his people and receive from them the companionship in the Lord that helps him live his vocation most fruitfully and joyfully and chastely!

Another new thing is happening now: the silence that opens up entirely new interior horizons in my soul and in my heart. In silence - within and without - every morning I get up with a newfound gratitude to Almighty God for having allowed me to enjoy another day in this world! In silence - within and without - I now have time to contemplate His goodness and look at the world in a fresh way and understand what a marvelous thing to be alive and not six-foot under! In the silence of my soul, not being in a rush to do stuff or to go here and there, I can take time to gaze on everything and discern God's hands behind every event and encounter. God is doing something new, because I have been forced to stop living the same way I had always been. Now, faced with the enormous challenges in front of me, I have learned to wait for His instructions, to follow His promptings, and to discover anew how much better to obey Him than to plan things according to my calculations, which are always sinful and short-sighted! Yes, God is doing something new, because I am not feeling hopeless and despairing (like I normally would have) when I think of the difficulties lying ahead.

Yes, I am perceiving God is doing something new in the world. I hope and pray you do too!

April 26, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

From the reliable OSV and the Boston Pilot, we have this consolidated report:

The extraordinary Urbi et Orbi Prayer Vigil in a desolate St. Peter's Square on the 27th of March was the finest hour to date of Pope Francis' seven-year pontificate. In a moment of global crisis, with the Church physically separated from its people and the people from the Church, Pope Francis blessed the city of Rome and the world with Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament. It was a solemn and powerfully moving reminder of Christ's abiding Presence and His undying love for us in these darkest hours. And it was exactly what we — the Church and the world — needed as we continue to reel from the coronavirus plague. With millions of people lives streaming the event from around the world, Pope Francis presided over a solemn Prayer Vigil that included a Scripture reading, a meditation, Veneration of the Crucifix and Eucharistic Adoration. The Crucifix that was present during the Prayer Vigil was not just an ordinary crucifix, but it was the famous Crucifix that ended the plague in Rome in the 16th century. This miraculous Crucifix was transferred from the Church of San Marcello al Corso by Vatican personnel in the evening of Wednesday the 25th of March, and was installed temporarily at St. Peter's Square on Thursday the 26th of March so that the pope could be in Its Presence during the Prayer Vigil on Friday the 27th of March. The whole event ended with benediction overlooking an eerily empty St. Peter's Square — what has become an iconic image from this time — and the Monstrance that contained the Blessed Sacrament held aloft as bells pealed loudly from above.

And now, four weeks later, the apocalypse predicted by all the experts has not materialized. Please don't call or write me to tell me I am stupid and naïve to be making this outrageous statement prematurely. This is still a free country! As far as I could see, the pandemic has not yet destroyed the hospital system in its epicenter in this country that is New York. People have not been dying in the hallways of medical centers

because there were no rooms for them on the floors. NY City even shipped some of its respirators to Upstate NY. In the deepest recesses of my heart, I truly believe the action by our Pope on the evening of the 27th of March - blessing the City of Rome and the world with the Most Blessed Sacrament - has touched Heaven, and God has responded and intervened to keep the worst from happening. Please don't call or email me to tell me I am wrong, but I absolutely believe that, once again, God has given us a powerful hint as to His whereabouts: He has always been there with us all along!

This Covid-19 plague is indeed a horrible and horrendous thing, but somehow God has used it to help us clarify a few things for ourselves. I myself am forever grateful to the Holy Father in his paternal solicitude for the welfare of the Church and the world. Ultimately, our lives are truly in God's hands. And I for one find it impossible to continue to live on this earth if I do not have that faith in my heart of hearts.

May 3, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

After two long articles, I will keep this one short!

I am sense a danger within me: complacency! I am getting used the quiet of my empty church, of my empty school, of the empty streets! This danger is there for all of us, I think! It is easy to get used to the new normal. For many of us, the new normal is life suspended in time but lived in cyber space - life lived virtually! Livestreamed Masses, Zoomed Rosaries, Tele-prayers! In fact, virtual living is rather convenient because we don't have to be personally invested as we would have to otherwise. In other words, there is little risk! I am praying for the day when we will see each other again - at church, for Holy Mass!

May God deepen our hunger for Him and rekindle the desire in us to visit Him in His Temple once again!

May 10, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Please join me in extending a warm welcome to our new principal, Mrs. Leslie Jones who will be joining our school on July 1, 2020. Leslie comes to us from Sacred Heart School in Medford where she served as the principal for 4 years. Prior to moving to Oregon, she was a classroom teacher at several schools in Oklahoma.

I want to sincerely thank all of the members of the Principal Search Committee for their engagement and hard work during the principal selection process. Their commitment to the St. Agatha School and Parish community was invaluable as we went through the selection process for our next school leader. I am confident in Mrs. Jones's leadership and know that she will be able to continue in her work as a servant leader as she transitions to the St. Agatha School and Parish community.

I want to thank Mr. Chris Harris for all of his exceptional contributions to St. Agatha during his tenure as principal. He has gone above and beyond normal expectations in order to make St. Agatha's school into what it has become today. He has worked tirelessly - at times behind the scene - to make sure the staff and the faculty would have what they needed to do their jobs. As principal, he has also cared a great deal for his students - all the children God has put in his charge. And Mr. Harris is still going the extra mile, even now, to make sure our students, your children, receive excellent education with distance learning! I salute him and I am most profoundly grateful to him for all that he has accomplished! We wish him well and we will keep him in our prayers as he begins his

transition to the St. Clare community. I hope to have an opportunity later on for all of us and the parish to say farewell to him and to thank him properly!

God bless all of you and keep you safe in His care.

Oh, and one more thing! Karen (who is a mother) reminded me to wish all mothers a Blessed Mother's Day! And so, I wish and I pray that all Mothers have a most Blessed Mother's Day! I shall also pray at Mass for all of your deceased mothers.

May 17, 2020 Bulletin: My dearest people:

I will tell you a recent conversation I had with a priest friend. He is very concerned that his parish shall remain empty even after normalization. Now, this priest friend of mine is an experienced pastor – he is not a rookie, but has quite a few years under his belt. In his life he has seen many ups and downs. But now he is really afraid that there will be no return to the good old days – the days before the darned Covid-19 plague. He is afraid that his people are so convinced that going to Mass is detrimental to their health that they would stay home for good! Why should they risk their lives venturing out to go to church if they have permission from the Bishop to stay home on Sundays? That one thought alone keeps him up at night. He is heart-broken whenever he thinks that the august Sacrifice of the Mass, which saves the world, is now being looked upon as something that might be contributing to the demise of the faithful. My priest friend cannot get over the fact that, for many people going to Mass on Sunday is an unhealthy thing!

My priest friend is now convinced that all the new requirements for the re-opening of public Masses are pointless, because people are too afraid to go back to church! I offered him this advice: "Don't be so anxious! Use this opportunity to catechize your people about the Mass! Tell them that, when they are at Mass physically, they are truly witnesses to the greatest act of love in human history! Tell them that, when they are in church for Mass, they are actually standing with our Lord's Mother and John and Mary Magdalene keeping watch with Him as He was dying! Tell them that God wants them to join Him at the altar, not just watch it from afar! Tell them that God wants His friends to be with Him in His House! Tell them that 'Blessed are they who are invited to the Lamb's Supper!' Remind them that during the Iraqi War when our soldiers were so far away from home, SKYPING was never adequate! Families wanted to have their loved ones in front of them in person! No amount of phone calls, emails, SKYPING, were enough to ease the sadness and the sorrow of physical separation! YouTube Mass is good, but real- life Mass is infinitely better! Above all, pray for your people that their hunger for the Holy Mass shall outweigh their fear of the virus!"

You know what I think? I think my priest friend is a worrywart! I think he should pray more! I think he ought to take a bike ride and just relax! People will return to church in due time!

May 24, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Mass has been reopened on a limited basis for almost three weeks now and I have observed some beautiful things!

The first thing I saw really warmed my heart: people who showed up for Mass were genuinely happy to be back in church; they were glad to be able to assist at Holy Mass - in person! All these weeks away from the altar had intensified this longing for Mass in the soul. They were simply joyful to be able to be physically present before the altar. This

simple fact speaks to the central meaning of the mystery of the Lord's Ascension (which we celebrate this Sunday), while we are in this world we do not belong to this world! We are made for heaven. As sojourners, our hearts continue to be restless until we have reached our destination – our heavenly homeland. The church is truly the gate of heaven, and our home away from our true home! My other observation is the recognition that folks were just simply happy to be together! Social distancing notwithstanding, people were pleased to see each other again after weeks cooped up in their own homes or apartments!

While the pandemic is still raging around us, please stay home as long as your health cannot stand up to the virus. The church will still be here to welcome you back when you could return! Meanwhile, God has seen fit to inspire and motivate our people to be generous with their support so that we could keep the lights on and the furnace running! May the Good Lord shower His blessings upon you all!

May 31, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Last Sunday we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord. The mystery of the Ascension reveals the mystery of the Man-God Jesus Christ. We know from where Jesus comes, because we see where He is going: He comes from the Father and now He is returning to Him. And this has great implication for us: our life is not hanging in thin air: God is our beginning and so He must be also our end.

Christ is the One who, in His incarnation, has united heaven and earth. He has joined together extremes: the poverty of man with the infinite riches of God, the lowly earth and the exalted heaven, the corruptible material and the enduring spiritual. Heaven is not a place faraway and above and beyond the most distant stars; heaven is where man can find place in God. Christ is heaven itself! Think about what Pope Benedict said a long time ago: “[Christ] himself is, therefore, what we call ‘heaven’, because heaven is not a space, but a person, the person of the one in whom God and man are forever inseparably united. And we get closer to the heaven, indeed we enter into heaven, in the measure in which we draw near to Jesus and enter into him.” (J. Ratzinger, Homily for Ascension 1975).

This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday. Christ went back to heaven so that He might be able to send us the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who will keep us on the path to heaven. It is the Holy Spirit who will keep us from losing our hearts in front of difficulties. It is the Holy Spirit who reminds us of our destiny and embolden us to strive toward that destiny in the midst of this constantly changing world! Come, Holy Spirit! Come, and renew the face of the earth! Amen!

June 7, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and a son of man that You care for him?” (Ps 8:5)

This one verse keeps reverberating in my soul these days when I am continually seized with wonder at how the good God has been “holding me close to Him” and refusing to let the anguished desolation of my circumstances crush me like a little bug of no consequence! The fact is, this darned virus have not succeeded to carry me off into the land of oblivion. That, to me, is already a most powerful testament to the sustaining love of the God of the living for me, for us. There is nothing like this insidious pandemic to

focus the mind on the one thing I would like to forget: how fragile and how transient human life truly is! (You can see that the pandemic is still very much on my mind!) And yet, most amazingly, God loves us still, and His love has been enough to keep at bay the terrible Coronavirus! But more than the fear of being stricken is this feeling of inadequacy, of helplessness, of “nothingness” in front of this illness. And so far the only reason why this nothingness I am feeling at this very moment is not able to crush me is, in the words of Fr. Julian Carron, “A ‘You’ who hears the cry”. More powerful than the most potent and deadly virus is the Presence of Someone who has heard my cry in the night. That Someone is mindful of me and “holds me dearer than the entire universe”! This is why, even in these terrible days of quarantine and social distancing, I could feel gratitude welling up in my heart: the knowledge of a “preference” by that Someone, Who has not ceased to be by my side so that I might “not be alone with [my] . . . nothingness”. Because that Someone is here, life is worth living.

Yes, it is tedious, but we must continue to take every necessary precaution to guard against contracting this insidious COVID-19. But ultimately, when all is said and done, what is more effective than the most powerful vaccine the scientists might come up with is the “certainty” of a “preference”! This and this alone will “vibrate” in the depths of our souls and keep us going - today, tomorrow, and forever!

PS: By the way, the above musings were inspired by something written by Fr. Carron for *Communio Liberatio*. Italicized words were taken from his talk.

June 14, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

"O sacrament of devotion! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!" St Augustine's exclamation captures the theme and sums up the words that Paul addressed to the Corinthians: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). The Eucharist is truly the sacrament and source of the Church's unity because the Holy Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. This has been stressed from the very beginning and is based on the sign of the bread and wine. This is how it is stated in the *Didache*, a very early document: "Just as this broken bread was first scattered on the mountains and, after being harvested, became one reality, so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom" (9, 1). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains this unity very effectively: "Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body - the Church." (CCC, 1396)

The vertical unity (between God and us) is the cause and the foundation of the horizontal unity among us – people who partake in the one Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We do not cause our own unity. This oneness is not something we produce or manufacture on our own. There is nothing we could do to effect this unity. This oneness that we experience is something given to us, effected in us, in virtue of the fact that we are members of the One Body of Christ and that we partake in the one Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

There is a saying, “Out of sight, out of mind.” As long as we shall remain apart from each other for whatever reason, and as long as we stay away from the Holy Mass for whatever reason, the natural thing will happen: our bonds of friendship, of charity, of affection, for each others shall be weakened and unravel – progressively, day-by-day. And the day will come when we no longer perceive at all the need to come together for

worship, because we don't feel any more in the depths of our souls this need for unity, for oneness, for belonging, for being together, for coming together, before the Lord. Out of sight, out of mind: the heart no longer vibrates with a preference for the Other (God) and for others, because the heart itself no longer experiences its being preferred by the Other and by others.

That is why I am praying a lot more now than I used to

June 21, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Today, the Friday of the second week after Pentecost, the 19th of June, is the Solemn Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. On this most solemn day, we beg from the Heart of our Blessed Lord and Savior mercy. We need mercy for ourselves, our families, our people, our country, our nation. We need mercy to overcome the hatred of self and of others. We need mercy to love what is seemingly unlovable in us and in others. We need mercy to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. This will come about if we beg for it from the merciful Savior.

Recently I learned from listening to the podcast "Catholic Stuff You Should Know," a wonderful podcast by a group of young priests in Denver, the story of a miracle. A man in his early forties was healed miraculously of stage-four stomach cancer. He was supposed to be dead but then the last scan revealed the total disappearance of the tumors in his stomach. This man was a Catholic, and he insisted that his cancer cure was truly the sign of another cure – greater and more miraculous: the cure of his soul! This happened because he was prompted by grace to ask God for the gift of forgiveness. In preparation for death, he wanted to make peace with his family, to ask forgiveness from those whom he had hurt or offended. Then he asked God for the grace to forgive all those who had injured him. And he was able to do just that. In the space a few months he was able to let go of all the animosity, all the resentment, and all the grudges he had been holding on to. And that was also the beginning of his physical healing.

I truly believe that that forgiveness is what is needed for ourselves, our Church, and our people. Now is the perfect time to beg from God for His mercy and for the ability to forgive. This is how we shall prosper and thrive – individually and together!

June 28, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The Summer solstice had come and gone, and here we are, facing down the long summer. At the same time, we know full well that, from now on, daylight hours have begun to be dwindling and the darkness of night creeping forth. That is a sobering thought, because it is another evidence of the shortness of this fleeting life. In these days of the summer of 2020, the summer of discontent, we will do well if we let the Word of God guide us through everything.

The Gospel of last Sunday proclaims three times: "Do not be afraid!" In plain language, our Blessed Lord tells us to not give in and give up in front of the existential threats that surround us. Now, compare this with that well-known saying by some famous politician, "There is no fear but fear itself!" Clearly, the latter is cleverer! Either way, both are saying essentially the same thing. But here is the crux: if some human beings like you and me had said something along those lines to me, my immediate reaction would have been blunt, "Easy for you to say!" I would have been quick to dismiss him without thinking

twice! Try to tell that to someone who is facing a terminal diagnosis of cancer! Nothing is more useless than truth spoken where it is not asked!

On the contrary, it is a completely different matter when it is our Blessed Lord Himself telling us to be strong, to be courageous, to be brave. It is a most solemn thing to be told by God Himself not to be fearful and not to be afraid, even in front mortal dangers. I must take all that to heart! When Christ, Who has conquered death itself, Who rose from the dead, Who has decisively vanquished the source of fear, is saying to me today, "Do not be afraid! Do not let your heart be troubled! Have faith in Me!" shouldn't I listen? I should listen especially since I know that, with Christ, there is never an issue of an "unfunded mandate"! He always backs up every encouragement, every exhortation, every demand, with His graces. He always makes it possible to do what He asks! Even more, He always walks the walk, not just talking the talk!

I would like to leave you with this thought from the Psalms: "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." Yes, the fear of God, and not of man! Yes, fear God, but fear in the sense of love, of affection, of honoring. Listen to Him! Obey Him! Do what He says! Follow Him wherever He goes! That is eternal life! That is our true security!

July 5, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I am deeply saddened by what happened to the statue of a great saint, St. Junipero Serra. And I am anxious thinking about what people have begun to say about pulling down all statues of Christ. Please read the following statement so you have a clearer picture about who St. Junipero Serra is.

On the Destruction of St. Junipero Serra Statue - Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone,
Archbishop of St. Francisco, California

What is happening to our society? A renewed national movement to heal memories and correct the injustices of racism and police brutality in our country has been hijacked by some into a movement of violence, looting and vandalism. The toppling and defacing of statues in Golden Gate Park, including that of St. Junipero Serra, have become the latest example. The memorialization of historic figures merits an honest and fair discussion as to how and to whom such honor should be given. But here, there was no such rational discussion; it was mob rule, a troubling phenomenon that seems to be repeating itself throughout the country.

Everyone who works for justice and equality joins in the outrage of those who have been and continue to be oppressed. It is especially true that followers of Jesus Christ – Christians – are called to work tirelessly for the dignity of all human beings. This is a cornerstone of our faith. Our dear city bears the name of one of history's most iconic figures of peace and goodwill: St. Francis of Assisi. For the past 800 years, the various Franciscan orders of brothers, sisters and priests that trace their inspiration back to him have been exemplary of not only serving, but identifying with, the poor and downtrodden and giving them their rightful dignity as children of God. St. Junipero Serra is no exception.

St. Serra made heroic sacrifices to protect the indigenous people of California from their Spanish conquerors, especially the soldiers. Even with his infirmed leg which caused him such pain, he walked all the way to Mexico City to obtain special faculties of governance

from the Viceroy of Spain in order to discipline the military who were abusing the Indians. And then he walked back to California. And lest there be any doubt, we have a physical reminder to this day: everywhere there is a presidio (soldiers' barracks) associated with a mission in the chain of 21 missions that he founded, the presidio is miles away from the mission itself and the school. St. Junipero Serra also offered them the best thing he had: the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, which he and his fellow Franciscan friars did through education, health care, and training in the agrarian arts.

All of this is not to deny that historical wrongs have occurred, even by people of good will, and healing of memories and reparation is much needed. But just as historical wrongs cannot be righted by keeping them hidden, neither can they be righted by re-writing the history. Anger against injustice can be a healthy response when it is that righteous indignation which moves a society forward. But as Christ himself teaches, and St. Francis modeled, love and not rage is the only answer.

July 12, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Today is the feast of the Chinese Martyrs, St. Augustine Zhao Rong and his 119 companions. These 120 martyrs died between 1648 and 1930. Most of them (eighty-seven) were born in China and were children, parents, catechists or laborers, ranging from nine years of age to seventy-two. Augustine Zhao Rong was a Chinese soldier who accompanied Bishop John Gabriel Taurin Dufresse (Paris Foreign Mission Society) to his martyrdom in Beijing. Augustine was baptized and not long after was ordained as a diocesan priest. He was martyred in 1815. These 120 martyrs were canonized in Rome on October 1, 2000.

Today at the Mass of the Martyrs, we prayed for freedom, we begged God for freedom. We did not ask that God protect our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion! We did not ask that God somehow "inspire" and "move" the States and the Federal Government to grant to the Church vast, expansive right to evangelize the culture. No! We simply begged God for our own freedom, that we have the necessary freedom in our souls with which to live our faith in the manner the Chinese Martyrs had lived their faith and died for it. In these tumultuous times, it is so easy to be intimidated by many external forces: by ideologies, by threats of violence, by political pressure, by viruses . . . Never have we been feeling so boxed in and so surrounded on all sides by the things that agitate to reduce us to nothingness. What is most needed now is the mature freedom for each one of us, so that, in front of our challenging circumstances, we don't run away from the place where God has placed us. It is tempting to kowtow to the reigning power of the moment so that we might be left alone, so that we might be safe, so that we might enjoy the pleasures of life. But true freedom is essential to us: it allows us to be standing upright and exercise our God-given right to pursue the authentic life God has destined for us - without fear and without timidity. That freedom is what makes us truly human. That freedom goes to the heart of my "I" and fortifies it against pressure from the outside world to bend it to the prevailing wisdom of the day without regard for objective truth. Thanks be to God, such freedom cannot be manufactured by the will, but can only be begged from God. St. Augustine Zhao Rong, pray for us!

July 19, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I have been adding prayers to our daily Masses and the 8:30 Sunday Mass. We recite the Angelus as the bell is rung. Then we say the prayer to St. Joseph by Pope Leo XIII. After Holy Communion we pray the Anima Christi ("Soul of Christ") while I clean the sacred vessels. When Mass is over we pray the 3 Hail Mary's, plus the Hail Holy Queen, plus a prayer for liberty of the Church, and the St. Michael Prayer. We conclude everything with 3 invocations to the Sacred Heart.

We pray these extra prayers daily and without fail for the last two months for one purpose: to beg heaven for the survival of our parish and our school. That is why I am asking the daily Mass goers to pray these extra prayers with me. Blessedly, they agreed! Some people have been bothered by the extra prayers – they seem like so much noisy chattering. But for me, there is something beautiful and sweet and comforting and powerful about praying these devotions together – we are bonded and we are united in our common goal: the future of our patrimony, the future of this little church St. Agatha's in this little corner of the city we call Sellwood. The lay people take the lead in these devotions, and I just follow along with the responses! And the more we pray together, the more I become "bullish" on our future!

These weeks and months of lockdown and shutdown and quarantine and shelter-in-place have been cruel on the human spirit, since we have been forced to live against our own nature. But the daily Mass and daily devotions have proved to be lifesavers. As long as we pray, there is hope to be had! Every day I look at the faces of the people at Mass and I am reminded of how good God is to me, how I have been blessed with such a great parish and such a great people – a people whose destiny and mine have been intertwined from all eternity! Come what may tomorrow, as long as we are still together, as long as we are united in our common faith and our common prayers, we shall be unbreakable!

July 26, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This month of July is special to me, because it marks a milestone in the life of a diocesan priest like me. It's the month that I began my work at St. Agatha's two years ago. I am now in my third year at this parish! The reason I am bringing this up is not to brag about anything (and especially not about my survival here!). I simply want to say how much I am grateful to the parishioners of this parish! You have been a part of my life now for two years, and you have shown me so much grace and kindness and hospitality! And the fact that the church is still operating now under these severe circumstances and conditions goes to show me that you care a great deal about this place. And because you care a great deal about this place, you have extended that care and that affection to the priest, to me (!), even at the cost of your comfort and ease! More than anything else, I am grateful that you have accepted me as your priest. You are no longer trying to get used to me – you have embraced me! The only thing I fear now is that this separation between priest and people because of the pandemic might undo to some extent the closeness we have had with each other! That is why I pray for you all every day. And when I say Mass for your intentions, I have in front of me your faces as I try to bring to the Lord your concerns, your challenges, your headaches and your heartaches in the way you would have Him hear them from your own hearts! God's Providence has your lives and mine intertwined in this way from all eternity. Why? I don't know! But what I do know

is that my salvation depends solely on how I serve you as your priest! Please pray for me! And please tell me if I could do better, with God's help!

August 2, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This morning I bade farewell to a young man who was getting ready to drive across the country in pursuit of a new life for himself and his family. This evening while cleaning up after dinner, I suddenly began to have a feeling of deep sadness over the loss of this wonderful family. I have learned to accept things like that over the years. I have resigned to the reality of changes, of separation, of losses – for they are part and parcel of life. And yet, in these times of quarantine and lockdown, the heart is bit more sensitive to everything any more - especially farewells and goodbyes! For long while now I have recognized that everyone whom I have met on the road of life came to me as a gift from God. It is God Who places people next to me, Who facilitates encounters that generate affections and produce lasting friendships for me, Who fills “the abyss of my life” with people whose faces help me to remember our common destiny and our shared humanity, so that in front of moments like these I may not lose heart and allow the nothingness of my origin crush me like a bug!

In these days of continued shutdown and lockdown and physical distancing, people are struggling mightily. And since priests are people too, they also struggle! We priests struggle to understand God's will for us. We struggle to find ways to continue the task of evangelizing and administering the Holy Mysteries under so many restrictions and in a climate of paralyzing fear. We struggle to stay connected to our parishioners while remaining sensitive to their desire to feel safe and be healthy. We struggle to provide for members of our flocks who voluntarily deprive themselves of the Sacraments for fear of catching the virus. We struggle to find ways to help people, devout people, to realize that no amount of watching televised and YouTube Masses and Rosaries and spiritual talks can be adequate to the pervasive nihilism that is taking over the whole world. We priests are struggling mightily because we fear that our people have begun to lose confidence in the power of God and because the beauty of God's house can no longer attract hearts and souls. We are witnessing today a vast desolate landscape stretching further and further toward the horizon – landscape on which stand empty churches, silent bell towers, and unvisited monasteries.

When all is said and done, the priest is only a mere man, and God is still God! When all is said and done, the only thing that brings hope and comfort is this knowledge articulated by St. Paul: “Everything will work towards the good of those who love God!” Amen!

August 9, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This past week marked the 40th anniversary of my arrival in this country from a refugee camp in Malaysia. I still remember vividly my car trip from PDX to the foster home where I would be living for the next 7 years. I still remember the extremely gigantic figure of Fr. Morton Park, who was head of Catholic Charities and who was the official sponsor of my case (the case of an unaccompanied minor in a UNHCR refugee camp). We fostered kids in this one home located at NE 33rd and Hancock Streets and we were very scared of him. He was not at all mean or unkind. It was just that he was so tall and he towered over us and he spoke mumbo-jumbo to us kids! We used to say among ourselves that we shall never speak Vietnamese in front of him, not particularly out of respect for him,

but because we suspected he might know Vietnamese and would be on to us and our squirrely mischievous endeavors! Fr. Park became Msgr. Park and died several years ago. He was a great priest!

Forty years on and here I am! When I arrived forty years ago, I was a scared and penniless refugee who did not speak a word of English, all alone in the world. But God in His great kindness saw to it that I did not only receive help to survive physically, but that I found a home in this land of migrants. And not only an earthly home, but a spiritual home: the Catholic Church. Forty years on, I am now an old man reflecting on the amazing goodness of God and how He has always been with me all these years! In my reflections, I cannot fail to recognize that God has truly shed His grace on this new homeland of mine, America! Only in America could a frightened homeless teenager who arrived from foreign shore with just a shirt on his back still manage to make something of his life for himself, for his family, and for God! For one thing, it's because of the great American people, whose generosity made possible success story after success story for countless waves of refugees who were brought here and offered freedom and opportunities. The Vietnamese people in this country are forever grateful to their host for the kind welcome from the beginning and for all manners of sacrifices they had made to help us start a new life here! From time to time people would ask me why I have not gone to visit this place or that, and I always give one answer: Why bother to go anywhere when I am already living in the greatest country on God's green earth? Thank God for America!

August 16, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Someone has said: "Never let a crisis go to waste!" We are in a crisis. This crisis is presenting us with a great opportunity to deepen our faith once more. Archbishop Sample is asking all his priests to re-evangelize their parishioners on the meaning and the beauty of Sunday Mass, so that we may always remember what Christ did at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday and live our faith with fervor from that knowledge. I am quoting now from a brilliant Catholic author, Mr. George Weigel, who quoted Flannery O'Connor from one of her letters to a friend on the Holy Eucharist.

. . . to cite a marvelous passage from a 1955 letter of Flannery O'Connor's, describing a New York dinner party at which the aspiring young writer was introduced to the already-successful author Mary McCarthy:

I was once . . . taken by some friends to have dinner with Mary McCarthy and her husband, Mr. Broadwater . . . She departed the Church at the age of 15 and is a Big Intellectual. We went at eight [o'clock] and at one [o'clock in the morning], I hadn't opened my mouth once, there being nothing for me in such company to say. . . . Well, toward morning the conversation turned to the Eucharist, which I, being the Catholic, was obviously supposed to defend. Mrs. Broadwater said when she was a child and received the Host, she thought of it as the Holy Ghost, He being the 'most portable' person of the Trinity; now she thought of it as a symbol and implied that it was a pretty good one. I then said, in a very shaky voice, "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it." That was all the defense I was capable of, but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it, except that it is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable.

How many Catholics today could make such a dramatic declaration that the Eucharist is what the Lord Jesus said it is: his very body and blood, through which we enter into communion with the Second Person of the Trinity? How many Catholics would be

shaken by what an evangelical Protestant once said to a Catholic friend: “If I really believed, like you say you do, that Christ himself is in that tabernacle, I’d be crawling up the aisle on my hands and knees.” How many Catholics would be able to explain to that evangelical brother that, while the Eucharist is indeed what Christ said of it and to believe that is to be awe-struck, the Lord Jesus also invites us at Mass to a personal intimacy with him in which awe is transformed into love?

I am confident you all know what the Eucharist is! God bless you!

August 23, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Again, I am quoting Mr. George Weigel who quotes St. Pope John Paul II about the “Eucharistic amazement” sense. Without this amazement, the Holy Mass will be just a boring empty ritual which conveys nothing of the tremendous awesome saving mystery that it truly is. Of course, when we go to Mass only out of a sense of duty, there will be no incentive to be faithful to Sunday Mass when the duty is no longer binding on our conscience. Thus, time spent at Mass is time wasted, time that should have been spent on something else more enjoyable and interesting! But if we truly understand what the Mass is, we would see in the Mass more than just our religious duty toward our Maker. The Mass is where we encounter God and therein we encounter our true humanity and destiny. The Mass is not only God’s instrument for our sanctity. The Mass makes us human! The Mass is truly the source and summit of our existence. Here is what I want you to consider:

In his 2003 encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (The Church from the Eucharist), Pope St. John Paul II invited Catholics to regain a sense of “Eucharistic amazement.” Being “amazed” by the Eucharist is probably not all that common these days. But Holy Mass should be all amazement, all the time. For in the celebration of the Eucharist, John Paul wrote, our time is linked to the time of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection, because the Eucharist has a “truly enormous ‘capacity,’ which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption.” In a spirit of Eucharistic amazement, we live history as His-story: God’s story.

The Holy Mass is awe-inspiring because Christ Himself is the true Celebrant who offers His own Body and Blood to the Father for our salvation. The Holy Mass re-presents or makes present again the Sacrifice of Calvary. The Holy Mass is where God reaches out to us and pulls us up into His own bosom and shelters us from all the things that aim at our destruction. Going to Mass is going towards our destiny.

August 30, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I am truly missing all of you who have been staying at home to protect yourselves. I have an idea that may bring us together – an idea inspired by God and has been tried in other places successfully! What if I would expose the Most Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance placed on a pedestal at the door of the church after the 8:30am Mass this Sunday (August the 30th). And if you should happen to be in the area and would like to receive Benediction, just drive very slowly by the front of the church between 9:45 and 10am. If you would roll down your car’s window and wave at me (I will be near the entrance of the church), then I shall know to bless you with the Sacred Host in the monstrance! That way you get to see the church, receive Benediction, and I get to see you and know that you are doing OK! Now, isn’t that a win-win situation? Besides, what have you got to lose?

I am also inviting people to join me in a film club I am forming. I am thinking of a group of 8 people (including myself). We would watch an excellent movie a month and we would spend time sharing our thoughts about the movie. I would pick a movie with a spiritual theme or message, replete with Catholic/Christian symbols and metaphors. This way we build a small faith companionship doing the thing we love: watching our favorite movies! Let me know if you are interested!
That is all I got. God bless!

September 6, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

There is more than one way to look at things, at life, at reality. I could either say to myself, "What are you going to do?" Or, I could say, "Wow, what an opportunity to pray even more intensely, to trust even more deeply, to depend on God even more firmly!" These times are unprecedented, as I have always said. There is no challenge like the challenge we are facing – nothing abstract about it! But as Christians, we cannot throw up our hands into the air after we have thrown in the towel into the ring! As Christians, we are invited to have recourse to the saints to help intercede for us with God. As Christians, we are invited to imitate the Blessed Mother in reflecting and pondering everything that is happening. As Christians, we are invited to follow the example of St. Joseph in his quiet and faithful obedience to God.

Every day now at daily Mass, we say the Angelus and the prayer Ad Te Beati Joseph right at 8:30 AM as the bell is ringing. After Mass, we pray three Hail Mary's, one Hail Holy Queen, and the St. Michael's prayer. We finish with three invocations to the Most Sacred Heart. Every day we recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and five decades of the Rosary. Every day, we feel the center is holding and the foundation is no longer slipping! The pandemic, the lockdown, the unrests, the riots, the lawlessness, and the violence: these are wreaking havoc in our local communities, but we are not helpless! You know why? Because God is good! The same God that performed mighty deeds in the past is not sleeping in a corner of heaven somewhere and leaving us to our devices. He is actively engaged in the world, and those with eyes of faith shall recognize Him in everything.

Please keep each other in prayer!

September 13, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

As of this typing, the state of Oregon is submerged in an inferno, it seems. Towns and cities fell one after another into the chaos of evacuations. The blood-red sun, the smoke filled sky, the relentless wind: everything gives the impression of an imminent apocalypse. At the same time, people continued to show up for the daily Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to pray for the world seemingly on the verge of collapse. I have also personally witnessed a tremendous act of selflessness and kindness by ordinary people risking their lives to rescue stranded motorists on the road. I have been asked to pray for volunteer firefighters who ignored their own safety as they looked for little grass or bush fires around houses in empty residential areas of small towns whose inhabitants had long evacuated. Where human altruism has fallen short, supernatural grace takes over and extends heaven's helping hand to those in need. In these times, prayers need to accompany actions. Please keep each other in prayer!

September 20, 2020 Bulletin: Letter from the Vatican on the celebration of the liturgy during and after the COVID 19 pandemic to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of the Catholic Church.

Let us return to the Eucharist with joy!

The pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus has produced upheavals not only in social, family, economic, educational, and work dynamics, but also in the life of the Christian community, including the liturgical dimension. To prevent the spread of the virus, rigid social distancing was necessary, which had repercussions on a fundamental trait of Christian life: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mt 18:20); "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:42-44).

This community dimension has a theological meaning: God is a relationship of Persons the Most Holy Trinity. He creates humanity in the relational complementarity between male and female because "it is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). He puts himself in relationship with man and woman and call them in turn to relationship with him. As Saint Augustine intuited, our heart is restless until it finds God and rests in him (cf. Confessions, I, 1). The Lord Jesus began his public ministry by calling to him himself a group of disciples to share with him the life and proclamation of the Kingdom; from this small flock the Church is born. Scripture use the image of a city to describe eternal life: the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21). A city is a community of people who share values, fundamental human and spiritual realities, places, times, and organized activities and who contribute to building the common good. While the pagans built temples dedicated only to the divinity, to which people had no access, Christians, as soon as they enjoyed freedom of worship, immediately built places that were domus Dei [the house of God] et domus ecclesiae [the house of the church], where the faithful could recognize themselves as the community of God, a people summoned for worship and constituted as a holy assembly. God can therefore proclaim: "I am your God, you will be my people" (cf. Ex 6:7; Dt 14:2). The Lord remains faithful to his Covenant (cf. Dt. 7:9) and Israel becomes for this very reason the Abode of God, the holy place of his presence in the world (cf. Ex 29:45; Lv 26: 11-12). For this reason, the house of the Lord presupposes to the presence of the family of the children of God. (to be continued next week)

September 27, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Please read the following story I came across online.

"A few months before he died, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was interviewed on national television: "Bishop Sheen, thousands of people around the world are inspired by her. Who were you inspired by? Maybe to some pope?" The bishop replied that his greatest source of inspiration was not a pope, a cardinal or another bishop, and not even a priest or nun, but an 11-year-old Chinese girl.

He explained that when the communists took power in China, they arrested a priest in his rectory near the church. The priest watched the communists frightened as they invaded the sacred building and headed for the sanctuary. Filled with hatred, they profaned the Tabernacle and took the ciborium [the sacred vessel holding the Consecrated Hosts] by throwing it on the ground, scattering Consecrated Hosts everywhere. It was a period of

persecution, and the priest knew exactly how many hosts were in the chalice: thirty-two. When the Communists retired to their camp, perhaps they had not seen or paid attention to a little girl who, praying in the back of the church, had witnessed everything. In the evening the little girl returned and, eluding the guard placed in the rectory, entered the church. There she made a holy hour of prayer, an act of love to repair the act of hatred. After his holy hour, she entered the sanctuary, knelt down and, leaning forward, with her tongue received Jesus in Holy Communion (at the time lay people were not allowed to touch the Eucharist with their hands).

The little girl continued to return every evening, making the holy hour and receiving the Eucharistic Jesus on the tongue. The thirtieth night, after consuming the host, by chance it made a noise and attracted the attention of the guard, who ran after her, grabbed her and hit her until she killed her with the back of her weapon. The priest witnessed this act of heroic martyrdom, who, disconsolate, looked from the window of his room transformed into a prison cell.

When Bishop Sheen heard that story, he was so inspired that he promised God that he would perform a holy hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament every day for the rest of his life. If that child had given a testimony with her own life of the real presence of her Savior in the Blessed Sacrament, the bishop was obliged to do the same. His only desire would have been to draw the world to the ardent Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The little girl taught the bishop the true value and zeal that must be nourished for the Eucharist; how faith can overlap any fear and how true love for Jesus in the Eucharist must transcend one's life."

October 3, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

October is here - month of the Holy Rosary! Please consider taking up the Rosary to pray for our country in these challenging times! Here is the next part of Cardinal Sara's letter on returning to Mass:

". . . Aware the God never abandons the humanity He has created, and that even the hardest trials can bear fruits of grace, we have accepted our distance from the Lord's altar as a time of Eucharistic fasting, useful for us to rediscover its vital importance, beauty and immeasurable preciousness. As soon as is possible, however, we must return to the Eucharist with a purified heart, with a renewed amazement, with an increased desire to meet the Lord, to be with him, to receive him and to bring him to our brothers and sisters with the witness of a life full of faith, love, and hope.

This time of deprivation gives us the grace to understand the heart of our brothers and sisters, the martyrs of Abitinae (beginning of the 4th century), who answered their judges with serene determination, despite a sure death sentence: "Sine Dominico non possumus." The absolute verb non possumus (we cannot) and the significance of the neuter non Dominicum (this which is the Lord's) cannot be translated with a single word. A very brief expression sums up a great wealth of nuances and meanings that are offered to our mediation today:

--- We cannot live, be Christians, fully realizing our humanity and the desires for good and happiness that dwell in our hearts without the Word of the Lord, which in the celebration of the liturgy takes shape and becomes a living word, spoken by God for those who today open their hearts to listen;

--- We cannot live as Christians without participating in the Sacrifice of the Cross in which the Lord Jesus gives himself unreservedly to save, by his death, humanity which had died

because of sin; the Redeemer associates humanity with himself and leads it back to the Father; in the embrace of the Crucified One all human suffering finds light and comfort; ---We cannot be without the banquet of the Eucharist, the table of the Lord to which we are invited as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters to receive the Risen Christ himself, present in body, blood, soul and divinity in that Bread of heaven which sustains us in the joys and labours of this earthly pilgrimage; ---We cannot be without the Christian community, the family of the Lord: we need to meet our brothers and sisters who share the sonship of God, the fraternity of Christ, the vocation and the search for holiness and the salvation of their souls in the rich diversity of ages, personal histories, charisms and vocations; ---We cannot be without the house of the Lord, which is our home, without the holy places where we were born to faith, where we discovered the provident presence of the Lord and discovered the merciful embrace that lifts up those who have fallen, where we consecrated our vocation to marriage or religious life, where we prayed and gave thanks, rejoiced and wept, where we entrusted to the Father our loved ones who had completed their earthly pilgrimage; ---We cannot be without the Lord's Day, without Sunday which gives light and meaning to the successions of days of work and to family and social responsibilities."

October 11, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

We have entered into our annual Fall 40 Days for Life prayer campaign. The nomination of a new Supreme Court justice brings to mind the preeminent issue of the Right to Life for unborn children. Without this most basic right, there can be no other rights. But we must also remember the Right to Life of the elderly, the handicapped, and others who cannot fend for themselves in their struggles to be alive.

Today I want to focus on the need for each of us, especially our seasoned parishioners, to have a Power of Attorney for Medical Decision prepared. The new Advance Directive is not a good way to protect you at the end of life concerning critical health care decisions. The other form that hospitals and doctors want you to sign, The Oregon Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST), is especially concerning since it leaves your life in the hand of the medical personnel who often don't know you (in particular, the so-called hospitalists who are supposed to look after you once you have been admitted to the hospital).

The best way to go is to have someone close to you (a family member or a friend) to hold the Power of Attorney for Medical Decision to decide your life-sustaining treatment on your behalf. This way, you can be most assured your wish shall be respected. The Advance Directive is very inflexible and can lock you into undesirable situations. Again, the Power of Attorney for Medical Decision is best when it comes to end-of-life treatment. Remember this Power of Attorney for Medical Decision is separate from the general Power of Attorney. Speak to your lawyer about this! Ask me a question and I will try to help you on this issue!

October 18, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

My article last week has caused some confusion. Basically, this is what I wanted to say: It is best to have prepared a Power of Attorney for Medical Care before you go to the hospital or in general. With that form, you simply designate someone whom you trust

to make end-of-life decisions for you on your behalf when you can no longer advocate for yourselves. This is a difficult topic but necessary. A lawyer could help you with such a form for a minimal fee. If you don't have a lawyer, I could find you one by looking around at neighboring parishes' bulletins!

The Advance Directive form could also be helpful, but please allow me to offer some suggestions.

The POST form should not be used at all for it entrusts your end-of-life care decisions into the hands of strangers who might not respect your wishes.

November is the month of All Souls. Like last year, you could send me the names of your deceased loved ones. Please make sure to send them to my attention. I will place those names on the altar for the entire month and remember to pray for them at Mass. You might include a stipend with the list of names. I will not keep the stipends for myself, but will use them instead to help struggling people and families.

I tested for COVID on Oct 8 and the result is negative! Thanks be to God!

October 25, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I came across these two paragraphs from a recent article written by an author who is a mother of six in First Things. These words resonate with me powerfully:

“But beyond face value, these findings pose the uncomfortable question about just how much “life” we are willing to give up for the sake of secondary goods. These secondary goods, like health and safety, undoubtedly make life better, but certainly don't define it, not even in the abstract. A good life isn't just an additive bundle of all the secondary goods. It isn't worth more if we are healthy, or able-bodied. And anything truly great requires real risks.

A morbid obsession with safety jettisons life in order to preserve life. (As I have six sons, this is a lesson I have to learn over and over again!) I hope that the political realignments of our time will include serious pushback against the notion that policy and class preferences for eliminating risk have moved us closer to the good life, or even to the good society. A sanitized life is no way to live.”

Thus, the question for me now is this: Am I trusting God enough so that I won't hesitate to respond to a sick call or request for Last Rites, to hear confessions, to distribute Holy Communion? If God is truly omnipotent, should I not let go of my small concerns about my own health in order to be free in the exercise of my priestly ministry? The only way for me to live is to be always conscious of the Presence of He Who holds my destiny in His hand and Who treasures me as the apple of His eye.

November 1, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I came across these two paragraphs from a recent book by Father Julian Carron:

“The more we suspend our humanity, the more we hesitate to recognize the value of what happens to us and become uncertain about the direction to take. This is the opposite of what the Spanish poet Jesús Montiel noted with emotion about his children during the coronavirus pandemic. “My children never fail to surprise me. During lockdown they never once complained, unlike us adults. They accept the situation because the true normality for children is their family. I observed that a child who grows up in a loving home, which isn't necessarily perfect, doesn't wish for much more. You are enough, they say. [...] I believe that children are the proof that we're not made for projects, but for loving and

being loved. Only in this way does the contingent situation make sense, and does the present not collapse.”⁷⁵

Children easily perceive what they need for living: the presence of their parents. We adults, paradoxically, balk and often slip into complaining. Obviously, there are adults who maintain and deepen the simple humanity of children. Etty Hillesum is a luminous example. In her Diary she wrote, “Oh God, I thank You for having created me as I am. I thank You for the sense of fulfillment I sometimes have; that fulfillment is after all nothing but being filled with You. I promise You to strive my whole life long for beauty and harmony and also humility and true love, whispers of which I hear inside me during my best moments.”

The Church is the family wherein we feel safe and protected – there, in the midst of the Church, we confidently call God our Father. Within the bosom of the Church we have the assurance we belong to Him, who recognizes us and loves us because He has made us for Himself. “Lord, to whom or to where shall we go? You have the word of eternal life!” I will always attempt to take care of myself, to do whatever I feel necessary to make sure I be around a while. In the end, nothing I do shall suffice, nothing I do shall be enough. I will always come up short against the nothingness that ever threatens to pull me down. “Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee!” Outside of God, nothing is permanent, nothing lasts, nothing prevails against the nihilism that is everywhere suffocating the soul.

November 8, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The election is over, although no winner yet (as of now, Thursday’s evening). In the end, what does matter, ultimately, is this:

“The One and only True God still reigns supreme over the universe and heaven.” Candidates win and lose, come and go, but God is always in charge — “as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.” “When we go sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament, we remind ourselves that God is the ultimate authority on all things.” We’ve fulfilled our duty as citizens by voting, and now, like so many things we had done in the past, we turn to the Lord and say: ‘Lord, it’s in your hands.’

Now, that is just about the size of the whole truth.

November 15, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

“Thus the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the most profound and significant expression of all our petitions and intercessions in spiritual and temporal concerns. We offer it when weighed down by adversity of all kinds, imploring therein consolation and assistance from Him who for our sake underwent so much sorrow and pain. . . . When the angel of death moves amongst us in times of contagion, we offer the Mass, imploring the Lord of life and death that He would stay the horrors of death. In behalf of the faithful who in the presence of God and of the Church are united in the bond of sacred matrimony, we offer the Holy Sacrifice, imploring for them the grace of fidelity and love and all the blessings of a Christian union until death shall part them. We offer it when our young Levites are chosen for service of the altar of the Lord by the imposition of hands; and when those selected from among the priests are consecrated to the office of chief shepherd [bishop], we implore for them the assistance of the great shepherd of souls (I Peter 2:25), that in word and deed they may be good shepherds and worthy dispensers of the mysteries of God,

and may be able to stand in judgment on the day of reckoning. We offer it for our brethren whom our Lord has called from this world, imploring the Judge of the living and the dead to be merciful to their souls and grant them eternal rest. We offer it for all the faithful, that God may impart to them grace and blessing and admit them to the eternal kingdom of heaven.” (from the book “THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS” by Rev. Dr. Nicholas Gehr)

November 22, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This Sunday is the first Sunday when we revert to 25 people in attendance at Mass. For how long? Nobody can really say – it may go beyond 4 weeks. Families are struggling to make ends meet, and, of course, we are also struggling as a parish. But the fact that we are still here, 8-9 months into the pandemic, shows that you all have been incredibly generous in your support. I am most grateful to God for you!

Now, I have to come to you with an extra request: the church needs a new roof. I don't know how else to say this. Due to constraints imposed by the city, we could only do one side of the church at a time – therein lies our saving grace! We will replace the roof on the church in two phases. And the cost of each phase would be roughly just under \$50,000. Please pray and see if you would be able to help. If St. Agatha's has been for you a true spiritual home in the midst of this chaotic world, and if you have found solace and strength among the people here, please help us!

Under the current circumstances, I cannot do a lot more than this article. I made this appeal last Sunday to those present at the Masses. And now I am making this appeal to all of you who read the weekly bulletin. May God bless us all!

November 29, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

On the occasion of Thanksgiving Day this past Thursday, I want to share with you some beautiful thoughts by Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien who wrote these words in 2012:

‘ . . . on this day only we voice a boastful devotion to America. We do so, convinced that despite our past and present national sins of racism, foreign oppression, materialism and consumerism among many other faults, “America, God has shed His grace on thee”. And for this grace, on this day, we give thanks, we express our gratitude. Thanks and gratitude flow from the realization that we have been given something undeserved, a totally unmerited, gift, for in spite of our many and continuing sins and shortcomings, God continues to bless us and for that we give thanks, this day, to God.

Increasingly, in our rapidly expanding secularized culture, many Americans – and we see it in today's media – give thanks to a blank on this Thanksgiving Day. A floating thanks, directed particularly to nowhere, to no one, fearing perhaps that any mention of God would be un-American, divisive in a pluralistic society. Those Presidents over the centuries who have called for this day to be celebrated, evidence no such reluctance.

Virtually every president since George Washington in proclaiming this a National Holiday has called for prayerful thanks to God on this day. The list, of course is long and I cite but two of our most beloved leaders. Our first President in 1789 called this Nation to “a day of public thanksgiving and prayer” for its “many single favors” from Almighty God. Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the Civil War, no less – proclaimed the last Thursday in November to be a “day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwells

in the Heavens” and called on all Americans, including those at sea and in foreign lands to celebrate this day.’

I, for one, am thankful for all of you, my dear parishioners! It is never too late to be thankful to other people and to Almighty God!

December 6, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

My dear people, by the grace of God, the governor of the state has decided to loosen her restrictions on church attendance at worship and religious services, even as the number of COVID cases is increasing. Thus, you no longer need to call Karen to make reservations for Mass (but still need to sign in at door). Christmas Masses are the exception to the new rule, we still ask you to let Karen know you are coming to one of the Christmas Masses so we could plan ahead. By the grace of God also, so far there has not been a COVID case linked to a Catholic Church in our Archdiocese that I am aware of. We continue to observe stringent measures to keep people from getting sick, knowing full well there is only so much we could do. We make every human effort possible in keeping people from getting sick by COVID, but God is truly the Author of our safety, our security, our health, our life. Even as we sanitize our hands with antiseptic gel, we do not neglect to fold our hands at the same time praying to Almighty God for protection for ourselves and our families.

By the grace of God we have received donations to the church roof fund. Should you be considering charities to which to donate your hard-earned dollars these last days of the year 2020, please consider my request for the church roof. At the beginning of the pandemic, I pleaded with you to please remember the church between the water and the electric bills. You have come through in a spectacular fashion! I am so grateful to God for you. And I am grateful to you! Be reassured that I do pray for my parish family – both the living and the deceased.

Finally, beginning this First Saturday of Advent, I will have Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church after morning Mass on Saturday until 11am. I will be hearing confessions if there be any interested penitents. God bless you all this First Week of Advent!

December 13, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This Christmas will be like no other in recent memory. But you can help to make it a great opportunity to celebrate the Birth of Our Blessed Lord spectacularly! My wish is that each family will have a Christmas tree and decorate it together. Even more significant than that is the presence of a Creche of a Manger or Nativity Scene at the most meaningful place in the home so that the children and the adults may truly remember the real reason for Christmas. I see nothing wrong with lights on the house to make it even more festive. Interiorly, what about the Rosary? The singing of Christmas carols around Christmas Day (“The Twelve Days of Christmas”, anyone?). And a wonderful Christmas brunch on Christmas Day? I don’t know what is feasible for your families, but Christmas is too important a Feast for Catholics to be discarded in the name of whatever. We do not neglect the health of the body, nor do we forget the health of our souls.

On the last Sunday before Christmas, namely the 20th of December this year, between the two morning Masses I will be at the door of the church with Crucifix and Holy Water

in hands to bless those who would like to drive (walk or bike) by the church for a blessing before Christmas! God bless you!

December 20, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This year 2020 is rapidly coming to a close. Many people couldn't wait for it to end. As for me, I thank God for this current year. From my vantage point, I see many hidden blessings so far. First of all, many families have been able to spend time together. Of course, they must stay together at home and do things together out of necessity. But by doing things together and having meals together (many for the first time in a long time) and staying in close quarters with each other, family members have been given opportunities to learn how to be a family once again. I am not denying that abuses and conflicts may increase in some situations, but with creativity and resourcefulness, being in near proximity to each other during the long period of lockdown has renewed a sense of belonging and feelings of kinship.

As for me, looking out on an almost empty church Sunday after Sunday has deepened my desire to serve – I have more robust appreciation of my parishioners and a more profound awareness of their contributions to the saving mission of the Church.

Another blessing I have received is the gift of a deeper prayer life. Out of necessity, I have learned to put more trust on God than on my own intelligence and life experience. The long weeks and months of the lockdown became occasions of grace for me: God has given me numerous signs and indications and hints; He has been helping me to recognize His presence with me and my people in the here and now. Through the challenges of this pandemic, I have discovered once again the truth of this wisdom: God is so great that nothing small escapes His notice. With God, no suffering is too small, no pain is too trivial, and no sorrow is too insignificant. God knows all, hears all, and answers all. Thanks be to God!

God bless you!

December 27, 2020 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

A man from Uganda was notified that he had tested positive for COVID, and the first words he uttered were these: "Thanks be to God!" This man, Brother Elio, was a great Catholic layman in his country Uganda. He was instrumental for the establishment of an important hospital, the rebuilding of the Cathedral, and many other monumental works of charity. He passed away recently of COVID, but the life of faith he lived continues on, even now, so that people still remember the very words he spoke upon receiving the terrible news of his illness. "Thanks be to God!" Only someone with a view broader than this visible world and a heart filled with affection for his eternal destiny promised by the One who is the author of everything could have spoken those words with total calm and abandonment. With a deep desire to obey God's will that resulted from his awareness of God's Exceptional Presence in this world, a Presence that had always sustained him and generated love and affection for his life in the heart, Brother Elio departed this world not in despair but in joy. "Thanks be to God!" How could anyone in his sound mind ever utter those words at the news of his possible demise? Only those who believe and who are certain of their eternal destiny in the Risen One can speak like that! That is why the Eternal Word of God came down from heaven and became a little child! The Incarnation is for you and for me so that we have the confidence that we were not created to be dead-

enders, but to be given a glorious destiny beyond anything we could ever imagine for ourselves. The Incarnation is an event for us so that the certainty of this destiny is as real as human flesh and blood!

Merry Christmas! God bless you!