

## A message to the Mission community

From Fr. Russ Brown

Is there a faith dimension to Coronavirus? Are there lessons to be learned that go beyond a purely medical response to a clear health crisis. The answer is yes, but we must look for them. They are not apparent in the 24-hour news-stream that feeds into our living room or on to our laptops. The politicos and medicos have other priorities at present, perhaps rightly.

As a community built on shared faith we must ask the questions and supply the answers. Our scriptures are filled with stories of sickness and healing, injury and recovery, doubt and faith. The great majority of Jesus' ministry was a ministry of healing and of outreach to those who lived with illness and uncertainty. For most of our lives these accounts remain no more than a dry and dusty history. Only once in a generation or two do they take on a lived reality and challenge us to respond as they do now.

As disciples, we are both spiritual care-givers and care-receivers. Sometime we are weak and sometime we are strong. Much of the time we are simply uncertain. All of these find a place in the story of our faith. In St. Mark's gospel Jesus' own disciples are uncertain and even faithless much of the time. But they become leaders when they finally are called upon. Very often it is a set of circumstances or an unexpected event that carries us beyond our daily mode of living to become either active leaders or faithful followers. Both are necessary.

The present Coronavirus epidemic is such an event. We can choose to engage it or we can choose to ignore it, each as best we can. But it would be a mistake simply to ignore it, to try and wait it out. Over years and centuries God has granted us the gift of vision, or simply the wisdom to look beyond the present moment. That used to be the work of prophets, and still is. We simply call them virologists and epidemiologists. We are granted a glimpse of the future and given time to respond to what we see; for better or for worse is ours to choose.

We are living in such a moment. We are blessed to have school and parish leadership that is both faithful and wise and we pray for local and national leadership that is also equal to the challenge before it. Above all we need guidance that is balanced, prudent and compassionate. Our thoughts and actions must represent these same qualities when making daily decisions.

Perhaps the quality of compassion is most evident. Those most at risk are the weakest and the elderly. The precautions currently in place are primarily with their lives and safety in mind. It is not every society that would sacrifice a great deal of its wealth and resources to secure its weakest members.

And yet this has been the case across the globe. Not every nation is a culturally a Christian nation, but virtually all have offered a Christian response out of compassion. In this there is great hope. And so we look ahead with hope and faith and continue to lead or follow as we are called.

I think it's important to remember in these days that social distancing is spatial, not spiritual. If we are asked to separate, we are not asked to isolate. More than at any recent period, we understand that we face this worldwide health crisis together; as friends and families but also as caring communities. That above all is the work and the will of the Holy Spirit.

Last week Bishop Garcia invited us to join with Pope Francis in praying a rosary for healing and deliverance. I conclude with the words of our Holy Father: "Mary, Mother of God, health of the sick, leads us to the luminous and transfigured face of Jesus Christ and to her Heart, to whom we turn with the prayer of the rosary, under the loving gaze of St. Joseph, Custodian of the Holy Family and of our families." (Pope Francis)

Amen.