

December 8, 2020

Dear Parishioners of Saint Petronille,

### **Martyrs of Charity**

Priests are required by canon law to take a retreat each year to renew their spiritual lives in a more profound way. About a year ago, I took my retreat at Saint Joseph Abbey in Benedict, Louisiana. In addition to some amazing artwork in their refectory and Abbey church and some beautiful liturgies and daily Divine Office, by chance, a long-time priest friend happened to be there. He mentioned to me some priest who were up for canonization in his home Diocese of Shreveport. Therefore, I was heartened to see an article in *Aleteia* recently about these martyrs.

This encounter and article are timely, because all five of these priests lost their lives ministering to the sick and the dying in time of an epidemic in 1873 in Louisiana. You might say that these priests “ran the other way.” As most were fleeing the area of the epidemic, these five went into the area knowing that nearly 1/3 of the population had yellow fever. They risked their lives and they knew it. The area was minority Catholic and so they went out of pure love for God and His people.

Many may wonder why they would be so thoughtless of their own welfare...shouldn't they have tried to preserve their lives so they could care for more people? My guess would be that these five French priests would respond: “But isn't this exactly the point. We ought not fail to minister.” The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church and so for a long time after their deaths, a great many of the area took great solace and hope from the generosity, faith and love of these five men. Even now, today, as they were declared Servants of God by the Church, a great many, once again, asks their intercession during this Covid-19 crisis.

Perhaps, we, too, then should pray asking for the intercession of Fr. Isidore Quémerais, Fr. Jean Pierre, Fr. Jean Marie Biler, Fr. Louis Gergaud, and Fr. Francois Le Vézouët for a swift end to our pandemic, healing for those who are sick, peace for those who have died as well as faith, hope and love to combat our fear and inspire us to generosity and care for others.

### **Funeral Masses and Anointing of the Sick**

The Church ministers to the sick and dying, because it is when we suffer that we are closest to the Lord carrying His cross. Suffering is a part of our lives here on earth. The question is not whether we will endure some suffering in this life, but how we bear it. Hence, the Church has a number of beautiful tools she gives to her faithful people to help them. Certainly, it is important to be with someone we love in their time of need, but we must also care for that part of them which we do not see. The interior of the person, their soul. We would never think (although now we often do) of refusing someone we love a glass of water or a morsel of food, if they asked. We would never refuse them pain-killer if they were in extreme pain; however, for some reason, we have begun to believe (and this is a recent phenomenon) that the soul does not require nourishment.

My friends, I must bring this up, because it is so incredibly important and a common misconception. A time of extreme illness or impending death is one of, if not the most, important moments in a person's life and, often, this is a moment when a person is not only being attacked physically but also spiritually, under attack in the depths of their souls. During these times, we need to provide those we love with the

spiritual food, help and remedy that the Lord offers. The presence of the priest giving absolution, anointing, giving Holy Communion and granting the Apostolic Pardon at the moment of death is MORE important than any water, food, pain-killer or medicine a medical doctor or caregiver can offer.

When you receive word that your loved-one is dying, the medical doctor may not be able to do anything more for them other than relieve their pain...this is where the doctor's job ends and the priest's job begins. Please do not deprive your loved-one of the Sacraments in these moments.

There is one catch: Because of the secularization of our society, many institutions no longer permit for the Sacraments being a need. It is a "would be nice if, but..." **Your priests, taking the requisite precautions and following the protective measures of the institution, are happy to come and give your love-one the Sacraments, but, typically, hospitals and nursing homes will not permit us to enter without a family member telling the institution that they want a priest to give the sacraments to their relative.** A family member, with as much advance lead time as possible, will need to phone the institution and gain admittance for the priest. Some times you will need to insist. Then please phone us and let us know and we will go. I, for example, am tested at regular intervals and will quarantine myself if ever exposed to a Covid-19 patient; however, the life of your loved one is more important than the time I would spend in quarantine.

**Simply phone the parish number (630-469-0404) and press '1' any time of the day or night.** A priest will be paged and we will get back to you quickly. Because some hospitals and nursing homes refuse to admit anyone except those caring for the physical needs of their patients: if you know you are going into the hospital, , if possible, please give the parish a call and invite us to your home before going into the hospital.

Sometimes a well-meaning family member will tell me, "Don't worry, Father, my Mom or Dad attended Mass everyday and would never miss church. They will be fine. You don't need to come and give them the Sacraments. Just pray with them over the phone." My friends, doesn't it make more sense if your relative never missed church and loved the Sacraments that we not deprive them of the sacraments now, in their moment of greatest need? By the way, unfortunately, the Sacraments cannot be administered over the phone nor through a microphone nor through an intercom nor mouthed through a closed window.

### **Funerals**

Saint Petronille, at present, still offers funeral Masses. We are permitted 80 individuals to attend in person and we live-stream Mass for those who wish to remain at home. Once again, it is important to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Most Holy Eucharist, for your loved one after their passing. We take all the requisite precautions. The value of uniting the sacrifice of your life to the Sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the good of the one you love at their passing cannot be underestimated. It is a tremendous act of love on your part. Please work with the funeral home to make the arrangements and we will be glad to offer a funeral Mass for your deceased loved one. Further, the Church has been doing this for a long time and the rituals we perform not only provide for the spiritual welfare of the deceased but also the consolation of the family. A funeral Mass can be a great help to family and friends, giving them closure and solace in their time of loss.

May Almighty God bless you and keep you.

In Christ, Fr. Thomas Milota