

PANDEMIC GRATITUDE?!

"Pandemic Gratitude?" It seems like an odd thing to say during these times. What are we supposed to be grateful for - supply shortages, long lines, widespread cancellations, fear, uncertainty, panic?

While these reactions are very understandable, let's take a step back and look at this through our Lenten lenses. While the COVID-19 virus is causing one pandemic, how about Lent causing a pandemic of a different kind, one of gratitude and action. Each Lent we are called to **Pray, Fast and Give Alms**. We are grateful for the opportunity to focus on the gifts we have been given, reflect on how to use these gifts responsibly for the furthering of God's kingdom here on earth, and then act. So, firstly, for what can we show gratitude?

We are grateful and PRAY for...

- Government leaders who have taken bold actions to keep us safe.
- The technology that allows us to stay informed and connected - even when we are encouraged to maintain social distance.
- Medical science and the researchers who are working around the clock to find a cure.
- Medical personnel, doctors, nurses and first responders who are on the front lines risking their own health to care for those who are affected.
- School administrators and teachers who are working to continue the education of our youth as seamlessly as possible.
- Custodial, maintenance and cleaning staff who work endless hours to disinfect and sanitize our buildings.
- The Pope, Bishops and all our Clergy who continue to provide for our spiritual nourishment.
- All those who are actively placing the common good ahead of personal gain.
- The return to health of all those affected, their caretakers, medical providers and those working for a cure.

While we can pray and be grateful for all of those who are working to ensure our health and safety, it is natural to feel overwhelmed and, perhaps, that there is nothing we can do to help. But, in reality, there are many ways to use our gifts given to us by our generous God to come to the aid of others.

Continuing our Lenten journey, we can FAST from...

- Selfishness by purchasing more than we really need so that others can have what they need.
- The panic and anxiety that surrounds us and remain calm and responsible.
- Negative thoughts and trust in the Lord's love and strength for us to move forward following the advice of our local leadership.
- Self-centered actions fueled by fear and turn ourselves outward to contribute to community awareness and solutions.

And finally, we can practice GIVING ALMS and performing acts of charity to...

- Assist our neighbors, especially the elderly and most vulnerable, by shopping for them and taking care of their errands when they cannot.
- Remember to wash our hands for at least twenty seconds. Instead of singing, why not pray The Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary? *That will be a bit longer than twenty seconds, but a few more moments of prayer won't hurt!*
- Be mindful that while many of us cannot attend Mass at this time, we can still save and mail our offertory gift to our parish or bring it with us when we are able to return, to continue the mission of our Church.
- Stay home if we don't feel well or if we are instructed to do so.

Do you recognize something here? Aren't these all things we are called to do anyway as responsible members of society? Yes, there is fear and uncertainty, but it is also a time to focus on the scriptural mandate to **"Be Not Afraid."** For in these times, and all times, we know and trust in God's Word, **"the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."** (Jn 1:5) It is a time to use our gifts responsibly to face not only this, but all the challenges in our lives.