

Friday of the Passion of the Lord: April 10, 2020

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“Social distancing”, “physical distancing”, “isolation”, “quarantines”, “flattening the curve”, “planking the curve.” In just a few weeks these expressions have become part of our everyday language. The reason for this is because of the explosive emergence of COVID-19, the illness caused by the new coronavirus. Why, just a few weeks ago I was laughing with some of you as we gave “elbow bumps” to each other in the church entranceway. But let’s face it, COVID-19 is no laughing matter and we are reminded of this right now as this service is being livestreamed rather than being held in-person (See: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2020/03/20/covid-19-in-pandemic-word-definitions-shift-and-new-lexicon-emerges>.)

There are now over 21,000 cases of COVID-19 across Canada. In the majority of cases the illness is pretty mild. We know in this situation people should check in with a health care professional but they usually do not require any major medical treatment. In some cases, however, COVID-19 can be serious, even fatal.

(s)See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html> AND <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/14/805289669/how-covid-19-kills-the-new-coronavirus-disease-can-take-a-deadly-turn>.)

The new coronavirus attacks the lungs, and as it enters lung cells it starts to reproduce and in so doing it destroys them. Since our bodies recognize the coronavirus as an enemy invader, this triggers our immune system to “kick in” and try to stop the virus from making more and more copies of itself. And here is where things can get really serious, because this immune system response to the coronavirus can destroy lung tissue and cause inflammation. The end result can be pneumonia, in which the air sacs in the lungs are filled with fluid and the **person struggles to breathe**. At this point it is hard for the lungs to get oxygen to the blood which is supposed to nourish all the organs in the person’s body. And without oxygen getting to the organs, the person dies.

(s)See: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/14/805289669/how-covid-19-kills-the-new-coronavirus-disease-can-take-a-deadly-turn> <https://www.al.com/life/2020/03/how-does-coronavirus-kill-you-when-it-does-covid-19-questions.html>.)

So, as we come together today - Good Friday, we pray for all those who have died due to COVID-19, as well as their loved ones, and all those heroic people who are serving others during this pandemic. In doing this, we are reminded that people everywhere experience bodily death...even Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel reading today, John describes key events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, as well as the crucifixion itself which resulted in his death. Crucifixion is a gruesome mode of execution, and that's why the Romans in Jesus' day used it - and they used it a lot. In fact, one Roman historian wrote of a particular instance that saw 2,000 people crucified in one day! The Romans crucified those found guilty of serious crimes and they crucified people who they considered were a major threat to the ruling power structure – people like Jesus of Nazareth. (See: <https://www.ajc.com/news/national/how-did-crucifixion-kill-jesus/C3z0FaYjKCghzENYH9LHzM/>)

So how do people die from crucifixion, from being nailed to a cross? Well, it can be from a combination of factors including blood loss and dehydration. In 2006 the Royal Society of Medicine published an article that considered Jesus' crucifixion and it suggested that as a crucified person suspended on a **cross struggles to breathe**, and this is because his chest is forced way forward, then a lack of oxygen would damage tissue and veins and cause blood to leak into the heart and lungs. This would make it very difficult for the heart to pump blood throughout the body, and the lack of oxygen to the organs would cause them to shut down and the person would die. (See: <https://www.ajc.com/news/national/how-did-crucifixion-kill-jesus/C3z0FaYjKCghzENYH9LHzM/>)

Notice this startling resemblance between how today people around the world can die from COVID-19 and what may have been the medical cause of Our Lord's death on that Cross some 2,000 years ago. In both cases, **a person struggles to breathe**, and this forced lack of oxygen can lead to the body organs shutting down and the person dying.

Of course, COVID-19 is due to a virus and crucifixion is a form of execution but there is an association between the two. And this makes it even more clear to us that Jesus Christ, who is truly God and truly man,

knows exactly what we are going through, no matter what our life situation is!

In fact our first reading today, taken from the prophet Isaiah and which points to Jesus, states “[s]urely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases.” And in the second reading’s description of Jesus it says that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are.”

So yes, we take comfort in the fact that Jesus has been through what we are going through but the strength and hope we get from him go deeper than this. We read in the Book of Genesis that, right at the dawn of humanity, Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see chaps. 2 and 3). This act of disobedience radically disrupted their relationship with God, and with each other, and this disruption, which is original sin, has passed on to humans everywhere.

But then God came to earth in the very Person of Jesus Christ, and in his tremendous suffering and Death by crucifixion Jesus showed his obedience, his union with the Father. And in his humanity, Jesus is also in union with us. Now because of this, Jesus’ union with the Father becomes our union with God and so Jesus is clearly THE path to eternal salvation. Through our baptism and belief in Jesus we become a new creation, we are made anew, and for this we give thanks.

While this livestreamed service reminds us that we are practicing physical distancing, we are, nevertheless, in union. We are in union with Jesus and so we are in union with each other. Because of this, let us rejoice by proclaiming: **We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world!**