

A SHORT REFLECTION BASED ON LOCK DOWN DUE TO COVID-19

Social distancing or Lock down, the words we hear everywhere these days. Human freedom is curtailed everywhere due to the outbreak of pandemic COVID-19. The whole world is helpless with it. Majority of humanity is in panic or in fear. Many are getting paralyzed spiritually, psychologically, financially and socially. Here we are obliged to heed the disciplines of those who are in authority both political and religious as well. The world had already faced such terrible challenges down through the centuries and believers found victory in every calamity by trusting in Jesus Christ. It's not the time to curse anyone (even God) or for self pity. But it's the time of an invitation for us to get up and raise our hands toward the Creator. Final answer and solution are with the Creator. And He says to us: *"Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you"* (Deuteronomy 31:6).

We can relay on God alone

As we return to the bible, we get answer and solution for every challenge we face. Lets take two examples to understand the situation. First one, we read in 1st Samuel 4, the terrible defeat of Israelites by the Philistines. After the first defeat, they brought the Arch of the Covenant from Shiloh but the Philistines captured it. In that war, Israel lost over 34,000 people. Second one is the Temple of Jerusalem. It was the pride and hope of Israel but it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD during the Siege of Jerusalem.

What we learn from here is that The Arch of the Covenant and Temple Jerusalem were not the permanent support for the chosen people but faith. Both of them were not God but the principal signs of the presence of God. Israel had manipulated the principal signs of God for their personal motives. We read in 1st Samuel 2:12: *"The sons Eli were worthless men; they had no regard for the LORD"*. Eli was a High Priest. His children paid no attention to the Lord, people and regulations concerning the sacrifice. After living a Godless life as they meet unexpected crisis or dangers, they turn to the Lord for instant help! Isn't it the same thing even today many people do? Do we manipulate the Word of God and Church practices?

One thing is sure that we cannot relay upon anything here on earth but on God alone. Our various social systems of security may fall apart, there remains only despair or faith, either terrible despair or heroic faith. It is not the Arch of the Covenant what saves us but God who is in it! So also it is not the social security systems save us but God who is in them. Real faith in Jesus brings real security in our lives and society. The present situation is a chance for us to repent and return to God. We are in the process of coming back to Him with repentance and faith. When people of Israel disobeyed, God said to Moses: *"Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people"* (Exodus 33:3). And Moses responded to God saying: *"If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here"* (Ex. 33:15). As we continue reading, God is willing to go with people by forgiving their sins. The power of the intercessory prayer of Moses! Imagine, what may happen to our systems and us if God does not go with? Jesus, we need you to go with us and do not leave us alone even for a second! We are nothing without you, Oh Lord. Our present situation stands as a question mark in front of us.

Power of the Prayer of a Priest

Another painful thing for many Christians in this difficult period is missing Church activities. You can be assured of the prayers and blessings from your priests. Every day over 450,000 Holy Masses are celebrated and you are there. When God said to Moses in Exodus 33:3: *“Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people,”* Moses responded to him saying: *“If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here”* (Ex 33:15). Each priest is interceding for the people of God in their fortune and misfortune. And God hears the prayers and answer them as we see throughout the Bible. One interesting thing I notice in the book of Exodus 28:12 - 17 about the breastplate of the High Priest. The breastplate was perhaps the most conspicuous of all the eight priestly garments worn by the high priest. Twelve precious stones set into gold casings were embedded unto the breastplate, upon which were inscribed the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. It was meant to remind him that he represented all the people, as mediator and intercessor, before the Lord (Exodus 28:29, 39:7). So also, in the daily celebration of the Holy Mass, each priest carries his people - as he puts on the vestments - in his heart and offers their intention to the Lord. I do it in a special way in the Eucharistic Celebration. The priests also should know their role in the Society. The breastplate of a priest can teach us a lot. In this sense, you are not deprived of the blessings and graces of the Holy Mass during this period of Lock Down.

Prophet Joel is telling the Priests of Israel during the period of plague and drought: *“Gird on sackcloth and lament, O priests, wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in; pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because cereal offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God”* (Joel 1:13). And *“Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, “Spare thy people, O LORD, and make not thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”* (Joel 2: 17). We see almost similar crisis in the Book of Numbers Chapter 16. As the result of the Revolt of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against Moses and Aaron, the people of Israel suffered from plague. Moses told Aaron: *“Take your censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone forth from the LORD, the plague has begun”* (Num 16:46). *“And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped”* (Num 16:48). A priest is a Gap filler! Gap filler is one that is able to stand in that cavity between the dead (the world) and the living (God). Often times we call it an intercessor one that prays and petitions for the favor of another. We find in the book of Numbers 16:48, that Aaron stood in this gap, between the dead and the living. In these above mentioned both incidents, priests stood in between altar and people, people and God. God heard the prayers and seen the incensing of the priests and delivered people from dangers. We understand here, the significance and effectiveness of prayer in Repentance and Fasting.

Power of the Sign of the Cross while praying

People as they pray, let them bless themselves with the sign of the Cross. The sign of the cross is not simply a way to begin praying. It is itself a powerful prayer that is meant to pour out tremendous blessings on our lives. By doing this, we invoke God’s presence, and invite Him to bless us, assist us, and guard us from all harm. St. John Chrysostom said this about the power of the Sign of the Cross: *“Never leave your house without making the sign of the cross. It will be to you a staff, a weapon, and an impregnable fortress. Neither man nor demon will dare to attack you, seeing you covered with such powerful armor. Let this sign teach you that you are a soldier, ready to combat*

against the demons, and ready to fight for the crown of justice. Are you ignorant of what the cross has done? It has vanquished death, destroyed sin, emptied hell, dethroned Satan, and restored the universe. Would you doubt its power?" For the further biblical knowledge about the power of the Sign of the Cross one may read in the books of Ezekiel and Revelation: *"And the LORD said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house" (Ezekiel 9:4 - 6) and saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3).* The sign of the Cross has the power to protect us from all harm, plague and dangers. By doing this, we rediscover the tremendous powers hidden in the Holy Cross of Jesus. In faith, we may turn this Lock down situation to an Upper Room experience of Apostles. A time to pray, experience Risen Christ and to have total renewal of life.

Conclusion

It is not a time to lose hope and faith in Jesus or in ourselves but to renew our faith in repentance, fasting and prayers. Here priests and faithful are joining together to go forward in worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who has the key of David and He has the full authority over Heaven and Earth. "... The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (Revelation 3:7).

I wish each and every one of you A Blessed Easter Season.

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