

5th Sunday of Easter (A)

Feast day of St. Damien of Molokai 5/10/2020

Dear friends and families of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Greetings of peace in the Lord!

It has been my prayer for your safety and health. Despite your unintentional fasting from receiving Jesus sacramentally, due to social distancing, I pray that your spiritual life is still being fed, in some way, through your prayers and the prayers of our community. I can't imagine the longing you all have to gather as a community to celebrate the Eucharist, our thanksgiving to God. But let us continue to entrust ourselves to our loving God through the words of the responsorial psalm this weekend, "Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our TRUST in you."

Arguably, while the uncertainty in our time causes stress — concerns about family, health, work, bills to pay, food for the table, etc. — but I believe that it also increases our faith in God. While it makes us feel our being finite, it drives us to look towards the transcendence. Uncertainty can either make or unmake us, but we should choose to learn to be strong in our faith. And no other teacher that can make us steadfast, it is our Lord Jesus.

This Sunday, we heard our Lord Jesus speaks a comforting and reassuring message to his disciples and all of us. It is his discourse at the last supper, his farewell message to his disciples. The phrase that stands out from his discourse is, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). It tells us that the fullness of meaning, life, and salvation resides and found in and through Jesus. He is the key to our pilgrimage in life, here and now, and the key to our eternal life. I find solace and comfort in praying with the words of our Lord Jesus during this challenging time. I hope it is the same with you. We heard him convincing his disciples to have faith in him, that he will secure a place for them in his father's house, that he will gather them together with him, and so they should not let their hearts be troubled. Our Lord wants to protect his disciples from despair and discouragement when persecutions and trials come their way. But they have to remain with him, and they have to trust him. If they do, they will not only persevere but will be able to do greater things. This is what Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do and will do greater ones than these..." (Jn 14:12). Wow! What a profound assurance that their faith in him will lead them to do greater things!

The narrative of the Book of the Acts of the Apostle gives evidence to the words of Jesus. While they remained faithful in prayer, they were inspired to courageously proclaimed the risen Lord. And while they grew in numbers, they also grew in caring for those vulnerable in their midst (cf. Acts 6:1-7). They indeed became "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own" (1 Pt 2:5). And these are what our Lord Jesus wills for us all!

In the history of our Church, those who believe in Jesus as the way, truth and life were able to do greater things. We find this through the people that the Church canonized to be venerated as saints, like our very own, St. Damien of Molokai, whose feast day is today. He was a great pastor of Molokai. His commitment to serving the lepers who were exile in Kaulapapa was undoubtedly a result of his faith in Jesus. He was ridiculed and misunderstood during his time. He was accused of something that he didn't do. He did suffer, but his love for the lepers, his care for them prevailed. It prevailed because of his love and faith in Jesus.

The late St. Pope John Paul II commented on his life during his beatification on 4th June 1995 he said, "he showed forth Christ's tenderness and mercy for every human being, revealing the beauty of that person's inner self which no illness, no deformity, no weakness can disfigure." St. Damien offered his life to the lepers, who were condemned to a slow death. He became a leper among the lepers. He suffered and died like them, believing that he would rise again in Christ, who is the way the truth and the life.

St. Damien is God's precious gift to us in Hawaii. He is our model to emulate for Christian service to the vulnerable and needy in our midst. One thing we also need to remember during his feast day is how he's able to survive in his ministry and a life of isolation in Kaulapapa with the lepers. He wrote in his letter, "I find consolation in the one and only friend who will never leave me, that is, our Divine Savior in the Holy Eucharist... Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the most tender of friends with souls who seek to please Him. His goodness knows how to proportion itself to the smallest of His creatures as to the greatest of them. Be not afraid then in your solitary conversations, to tell Him of your miseries, your fears, your worries, of those who are dear to you, of your projects, and of your hopes. Do so with confidence and with an open heart."

I can't agree more with what St. Damien had said about the comforting and healing power of the Blessed Sacrament, the presence of Jesus par excellence. Let us continue to entrust ourselves in God's providence that, like the early disciples of Jesus and St. Damien, that filled with much hope we grow in our faith and lead us to do greater things.

Happy Mother's Day to all our wonderful mothers of CCST!

With my prayers, I remain

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor, CCST