



Archbishop of Montreal

Homily
Sunday, April 19, 2020

Second Sunday of Easter (or Sunday of Divine Mercy) - Year A (Jn 20, 19-31)

Holy God! Holy Mighty One! Holy Immortal One! Have mercy on us.

We implore your divine mercy during this pandemic, which continues to engulf us. This feast of Divine Mercy is a special time, not only to pray for God's mercy but also to entrust all of humanity to Him.

This pandemic erupted as a battle, putting not only all of humanity to the test but our individual humanity, as well. We are facing an unfamiliar, bewildering battle whose game plan we have only begun to uncover. Usually, when we think of war, we picture young people going to the frontlines while their parents remain at home, worried about their children's fate. In the current pandemic, however, all generations are at risk and vulnerable, but seniors are most at risk. The highest percentage of deaths occurs among them. Seniors are on the frontline in this battle, while their children, confined at home, worry about them, suffer for them, and suffer with them. The inability to be with their parents during an illness and, in some cases, as a parent faces the end of their life, is totally distressing. The battle we face seems surrealistic,

a totally new struggle in which all of us are engaged, affecting our whole being, and, at the same time, all people.

At this time, most probably everyone wishes they could be a doctor, a nurse, an orderly, a caregiver or an attendant to help those seniors who have been exposed to the virus and are at risk. And just as likely, among the sufferings we bear is the fear that our parents will fall ill or that we feel powerless in being able to act on our desire to help out. Whether our parents

are sick, or perhaps deceased, or healthy but in confinement, we all feel deeply concerned as human beings stemming from the anguish we're experiencing. We are becoming more mindful — although already aware — indeed more mindful of the fact that we all share the same humanity. Even the grief suffered by another in seeing his or her parents sick, vulnerable or facing the end of life, is a suffering we ourselves feel, not only through compassionate understanding, but in the way we take on this suffering.

The Psalm of the Good Shepherd speaks about the shepherd who cares for his sheep and guides us through the valley of death. What is the valley of death? The valley of death is that space where no one can reach us anymore. It's the space where we are alone, alone with our-selves, alone in the face of death. But the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, who bore all our

sufferings, sins and downfalls on the cross and rose again, has the power, the power of presence, the power to be totally present to every human being entering the valley of death. And in that sense, we can find ourselves squarely on the frontline as a doctor, a nurse, orderly or caregiver. But we can also find ourselves on the frontline of prayer. Does prayer actually constitute a frontline? When we pray to God, we are engaging in battle. We are fighting for those now alone in the valley of death.

The times in which we are currently living, perhaps, is a time to see the full potential of human commitment in action as well as to realize that generally we also feel quite powerless. But at the same time, prayer broadens our horizon. Prayer makes it possible to entrust every-thing, to place everything in the merciful hands of Jesus. Prayer enables us to believe that, in suffering, Jesus Christ has the power to visit that sick person whom we cannot visit. Jesus Christ has the power to be present within the heart of our father, our mother, our grandfather, our grandmother who is sick and we are unable to be present. We feel far away, too far away. We do not see anyway to get physically closer; it seems impossible. Yet, Jesus Christ has this power. And certainly our prayer can encompass several dimensions. (These dimensions will be included in the Prayers of the Faithful that will be offered later.)

Our prayer, at first, may be for the sick themselves, for those facing the end of life, that they may know that God has not abandoned them. Not only does God not abandon them, but if they find themselves alone when approaching the valley of death, it is not because we have abandoned them; it is because we are powerless, having contributed all we could in fighting this disease on the frontline, in serving life, and in supporting those directly engaged in the

battle. All members of society are duty-bound to support those who are directly fighting this battle. We can engage through our own battle-by-prayer approach, prayer that is all-encompassing, which includes prayers of support, for the sick and all those serving in the battle for life on the frontline, and for immediate and concrete care of all who are sick.

So, to pray is to offer prayers for the sick, for the concerned individuals, for those on the front-line caring for them, and for society in its numerous mobilization efforts to support the sick and those who care for them. It means praying for governments that throughout this ordeal, which affects everyone and in which we feel powerless, the battle will be fought and mobilization efforts will be carried out in a spirit of solidarity and social peace.

It is a spiritual battle involving the whole Church, those who believe in God, the need to entrust all mankind to God.

It is a battle for humanity itself. Regardless of our differences, cultures, nationalities, beliefs, may we rediscover that we are all brothers and sisters in humanity, that we all share the same humanity.

And given the sense that we are being tested in battle, it is also a test of our humanity. It presents an opportunity for humanity. The test is an opportunity; the test is also a double-edged sword. It can lead us to withdraw into ourselves, to try to find a way out, for ourselves perhaps; or it can lead us to open up to others and not to go it alone. "I" will come out of this. But in trying to come out of it, to overcome it, it must be "we" who will come out of it. We're going to get through this together. We might be facing a local battle, but it is also a global one. We are going to get through it. We are going to support each other. And we're going to share our resources; we're going to help one another. We're going to pray, all of us together, no matter what our perspectives. We're going to reflect; we're going to take time to enjoy silence; we're going to encounter ourselves at a deeper level.

Let us take this day to trust in God's Mercy and to rely on Him. Our life revolves between God's Mercy and God's Providence. Our Merciful God fills us with his mercy, and at the same time, He remains ever-present. He is there to support us, to give us his life, to give us life, and to guide us along the path of life. He inspires within our hearts a resurgence of confidence, generosity, selflessness and humility.

We live in a time when the powers of this world and our own powers, our own abilities, are learning just how limited these powers really are. The scientific, financial and political sectors are all feeling the effects of these limitations and constraints. We are discovering the constraints on family life when we can no longer be as physically supportive as before, when we can no longer physically accompany a family member facing the end of life. We're discovering our own limitations. The trials engendered by these limitations can be very discouraging. But it can also

be a time of growth, a time when, by opening ourselves to God, we rediscover just how fully God is present, how He remains present at the door of our heart, and how we can offer absolutely everything to Him: every trial, every tribulation, including this COVID-19 crisis, and this sorrow in which we find ourselves. So let us take time to reflect upon and entrust to God our situation, the whole of humanity, our families, those struck by COVID-19, those in need of surgery and whose operations have been postponed, and also those dying from causes other than COVID-19.

Let us entrust all humanity to God, to Merciful Jesus. Holy God! Holy Mighty One! Holy Immortal One! Have mercy on us and on the whole world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal