

Dear Faithful of St. Hugh of Lincoln,

March 22, 1970, which was Palm Sunday, was the first Sunday when the Novus Ordo Mass was made obligatory in the whole USA.

And on this Sunday, March 22, the Novus Ordo Mass, a Protestant service with which the enemies of God sought to replace the true traditional Mass, is not celebrated publicly anywhere in this country. And today is also the first Sunday since Fr. McGuire became the pastor of St. Hugh of Lincoln, when there will be no Sunday Mass in our church. For twelve years at least, this little church of ours, which is one of the safe havens in this country still keeping the light of Faith burning, has had uninterrupted Sunday Mass. Though sometimes a scheduled weekday Mass has had to be cancelled, either because of harsh weather, travel problems, or unavailability of a priest, until now no wind or rain or hail, or sickness or travel, has ever cancelled the Sunday Mass.

Then on March 17 this year, the feast of St. Patrick, in the midst of the Coronavirus scare, the Governor of Wisconsin issued an order forbidding any gatherings with more than ten people. Should anyone, a priest or a church included, violate this order, the punishment would be heavy fines or even time in jail.

So the pastor of our church was in a terrible dilemma: whether to obey the governor's orders and cancel the true pleasing and propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass, so much needed today in Wisconsin and in the world; or whether to celebrate the Mass as scheduled, and therefore risk to get our priest and faithful arrested, and maybe put the existence of the whole parish in danger.

The cancellation of the Sunday Mass today was truly a painful decision to make. But at least it has taught us that this present crisis goes far beyond any danger from the Coronavirus. We must now, at the latest, see that we Catholics cannot keep expecting help and favors from the opponents of God and His Church, collectively called the world. Jesus said to the Jews, who were expecting an earthly Messiah and sought to kill Him: "You are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world." (John 8: 23)

Though the false Novus Ordo church has sought to stop us from celebrating the true Mass for 50 plus years now, until this time we have been blessed to enjoy at least a level of tolerance from the state officials. Not anymore. We seem to be entering into a new age in our country's church history. What the Novus Ordo church, the illnesses, and severe weather could not accomplish during all these years, the Governor of Wisconsin did with one stroke of his pen. Just like a responsory in the Maundy Thursday Tenebrae says: "My enemies devised counsels against me, saying: Let us cast wood on his bread, and raise him out of the land of the living, and let his name be mentioned no more." (Jeremias 11:19)

We are now in an age when we cannot anymore expect the world to protect our right to worship God and to fulfill our duties to Him. It doesn't even matter who the President or the other elected or appointed officials are. If the Governor of Wisconsin wants to close down the schools, the services, and the churches, and give us wood instead of our heavenly eucharistic food, he can do it as he wills. And there is no one who can or will question his authority to do this. Everything goes when there exists the excuse of a

state of emergency. And what is a state of emergency? A state of emergency is whatever the world says it is. "Thus saith our Lord: Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his army, and his heart departeth from our Lord. For he shall be as little bushes in the desert, and shall not see when good shall come." (Jeremias 17:5-6)

It might be said that we must be obedient citizens and obey our lawful officials. And this is of course very true. But as the Catholic Faith - and even common sense - tells us, obedience only goes as far as does the authority of the person commanding. That's why obedience to God knows no limits whatsoever, because His authority is infinite; while the authority of any human being is always subjected to the laws and Will of God, and obedience to any human or earthly power can never go against what we owe to almighty God.

But this argument of obedience is nonsense in any case. Any state in history, whether Christian, pagan, or secular, has never had more law-binding and dutiful subjects as the Catholics, who take their Faith seriously, have been throughout the centuries. By persecuting the Catholic faithful, all the past states and empires have prepared their own destruction. Constantine the Great, the first baptized Emperor of the Roman Empire, declared before the Bishops assembled at Nicaea, that if the Romans had killed as many of their foreign enemies as they had slaughtered Christians, there would be no barbarians left to threaten the safety of the Empire.

We should answer to the officials who dare to take the Mass away as did the Catholics in the time of the Roman martyrs. Emperor Julian the Apostate ordered the great church which Constantine had built at Antioch to be closed, and had the pagan temple of Apollo, which the Christians had burned down, to be restored with its idolatry. One day when he was passing through the streets of Antioch, he heard the Deaconess St. Publia with her band of consecrated virgins singing the words of the Psalm 134: "The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold, the works of mens hands. Let them that make them become like to them." Enraged Julian ordered them to stop, but they immediately intoned Psalm 67: "Let God arise, and let His enemies be dispersed." The Emperor then had his soldiers fiercely beat this heroic woman, but she happily took the beating, and died soon afterwards. When Julian was later making a sacrifice to the idols, an aged and blind Bishop Maris of Chalcedon, led by a child, harshly reproved him of this most wicked act. So the Emperor asked if the Bishop thought his Galilean God could heal him of his infirmity. And the Bishop answered: "I thank God that I am blind, so that I am spared to look upon the face of such an apostate as you are."

So we Catholics of our own time know, both from our Faith and the example of the Saints, that we can never be claimed to be disobedient, if we call the world to answer for its guilt of depriving God the true worship due to Him. What we don't know at the moment is this: the world has now cast wood as our bread; will it someday seek to lift us from the land of the living?

But while we wait patiently and in peace and trust the answer to this question, we cannot let the important lessons we learn from this crisis escape us.

The first one is this: From now on, never take your Mass, not even the Sunday Mass, as something for granted. Sometimes we Catholics tend to think, that since we are obliged

under the pain of mortal sin to attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day, the Mass is something which will always be there for us or is our right. That is not true. The only thing which we are entitled to is the eternal punishment due to our sins. And if it has been your habit in the past to miss the Mass, you might suddenly find out that you don't have a Mass to miss anymore. Never overlook the Sunday Mass anymore, when and if God shows His mercy and restores it to you.

Secondly, never show ingratitude or lack of appreciation to your priests. A priest is the one who baptizes you, hears your confession, gives you the Body and Blood of Christ, says the Mass for you, gives you to your spouse, and finally buries you. No statesman, a family member, or a friend can do to you what a priest can. Who is there to hear your confession and to say Mass for you, should there be no priest who, without sparing his time, effort and exhaustion, comes to you week after week, and year after year? No man, and not even an angel, can do to you what a priest does. "Let man alone, in whose nostrils is but a breath; for what is he worth?" (Isaias 2:22)

Finally, don't let this opportunity to sacrifice your loss to God go waste. If you don't have a chance to receive God in Holy Communion, make now a spiritual communion every day, and put all your thoughts, efforts and hopes to the day when you can receive Him again. If you cannot now receive the absolution from your sins in the sacrament of Penance, say the act of contrition frequently, several times a day. And if you, like Our Lady, have to see your Christ taken away, at least for a while, greet Her every day with the recitation of Her Rosary. She better than anyone understands and supports you in the time of this sorrow, as a true Mother always does.

Today is Laetare Sunday, the middle of this perhaps our most demanding Lenten season we have ever had. Today we remember how the Jews, returning from their long captivity to their homeland, flattered themselves with the idea, that by their newly found strength they will rebuild a magnificent temple. But through His prophets God Almighty told them that because of their love of the world, their great Temple would be destroyed. But God also told them that the old and imperfect rites would soon be abolished, and His grace would be poured to the whole world. "Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and come together all you that love her: rejoice with joy you that have been in sorrow." A true and patient follower of Christ laments the loss of all the graces what sin and the world have deprived him of. But he never ceases to be happy and rejoice in the great mercy of God what He has stored for him. That mercy God is showing plentifully already in this world, and most abundantly in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Yours in Christ and Mary,

Fr. Lehtoranta
Laetare Sunday, March 22, 2020