

***Fifth Sunday of Lent***  
***March 29, 2020***

*“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!” (Psalm 130)*

Years ago the great Church Father and Saint, Augustine of Hippo, while preaching to his congregation concerning Psalm 130, asked his listeners this question: “When we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or ‘out of the depths’ of a humble and contrite heart?” I begin the homily today with this question from Saint Augustine for it provides an extraordinary summary of the spiritual life in one sentence. It is through this necessary darkness (the depths) which allows our prayer life, our spiritual life to grow and develop.

Times of crisis, such as the one we are currently in, can provide us many unexpected opportunities to grow spiritually. We may find ourselves finishing projects we have had to put off, spending more time with family members, catching up on our reading and letter writing. Some may be taking this time to clean and organize their homes or apartments; throwing away or donating unused and forgotten items. I find it amazing how much I have managed to collect as compared to how little I truly need. It is this realization which will provide the first step of our spiritual growth - discernment. We are provided an opportunity to distinguish which material objects are truly necessary and which are not. Our detachment from material things can now move our hearts inward. This inward movement of our heart now opens the door to solitude.

When the Church speaks of Solitude, she does not mean loneliness. Solitude is different because it allows our mind and heart to become solely focused upon God without material distractions complicating our insights. Put simply, it allows us time to recollect and reflect. What should we reflect upon? Our inevitable end, that moment when we stand before God. We now can distinguish which of our actions are truly superficial and which are substantial toward helping us develop into the saints we are all called to become. I now ask myself concerning an action I am about to perform: “Will this action lead me closer to God deepening my relationship with Him, or will the action only continue to draw my attention away from what should be most important in my life?”

I am fully aware that many of us still have daily duties that we are required to maintain. For some, with children now home, these responsibilities may have increased fourfold. For others, these quiet moments may offer a great temptation to retreat away from self-reflection, losing ourselves into television, games, or social media. There may still be some whose anxiety and worry seem to increase as each new case is reported as breaking news. I only ask that all of us take this time as a gift from God. It may appear odd to describe our situation as a gift. Nonetheless, it is a gift allowing us to focus upon what is most important in our lives. Ask yourself this one question: “How do you want to see yourself after all of this ends - a wiser, more spiritually alive person or someone who can now walk around wearing a tee shirt which says ‘I Survived the Great Toilet Paper Shortage of 2020?’” The choice is yours to make.