



## AT A DISTANCE

### *The Lent We Prayed For - But Never Really Wanted*

*Greetings Blessed Ones,*

*I truly hope this note finds you and your loved ones well and adapting to the new and fluid realities that emerge daily. You are a blessed family of faith, and Mona and I are privileged to be a part of this Circle.*

*Our Lenten Theme was, and continues to be “Portals, a Journey of Discovery.” We have certainly had the opportunity to enter some new and sometimes scary portals in the last several weeks. The first two Portals we opened were the Portal of Introspection and the Portal of Faith. Collectively on Ash Wednesday and on the First Sunday of Lent we prayed for the strength and the time to look inwardly this Lenten Season. Slow down a little bit, engage ourselves, slowly, quietly but for sure on our own terms. Goodness, our prayers were certainly answered! But not how we ever could have imagined. Time for introspection came in the form of physical distancing, restaurant closures, cancellation of Major League Baseball opening day, schools closed, meetings and worship cancelled. My goodness! We now have the opportunity to engage Jesus up close and personally but certainly not in the ways we were probably considering.*

*COVID-19 has challenged us in so many ways. Shattering the routines that added structure and meaning to our lives. Forcing us to prioritize and realize what is truly valuable. Wrap up tight with our Families and craft creative ways to stay in community. Lent is patterned after Jesus’ Forty Day stay in*

*the Desert before His public ministry began. Jesus' Vision Quest, his time of understanding and clarifying what he should do next to fulfill his call to serve. COVID -19 has become our time in the desert, a Lent that we could never have imagined. Forcing us to look ourselves right in the eye and right in the soul and discover who we are and what we stand for.*

*How will we live into the Jesus Way when all of our routines and social structures that we depended on temporarily disappear. What is left without our meetings and our entertainment and our communal worship. Our bars and restaurants closed, Broadway and Las Vegas now darkened shells. This is a Lent like most of us have never experienced. What will continue to sustain us? My thoughts are drawn to the early Christians huddled in the Catacombs, the Apostles huddled in fear in the Upper Room. Christianity stripped down to the lowest common denominator, the irreducible minimum... that is, in fact, everything. These Christians had it all, their Faith in God and Jesus, their Prayers and most importantly each other. Community...."where two or three are gathered together, I am in the midst of them." Jesus' words ringing through the COVID-19 haze. Jesus telling us clearly, "You have each other, you have Me, and the Holy Spirit!" The message of the Angel Gabriel ringing clearly... "Do not be afraid, Do not be afraid."*

*Blessed Ones, this Lent challenges us to find new, different and creative ways to live into our Jesus Way Walk as individuals, as families and as a community of faith. You are responding to those challenges beautifully. Sheryl Haase and Dianne Epperson offering rides to the doctor and offering to pick up groceries and supplies. Pat Stevens offering to share her toilet paper. Others offering to share milk and coffee. Most of you simply calling one another to "check in". The simple message, "I was just thinking about you..." is one of the most powerful messages of faith that there is. Remember to pray and pray often. As St. Francis has said... "Pray often, and if necessary, use words." Let our actions be our prayers during this time of trial.*

*Saints, I know we will continue to walk through all of our upcoming Portals this Lenten Season and beyond. We will continue to walk as we have with courage, dignity and honor, respecting our Baptismal Vows to respect the dignity of every human being. We will all emerge from our time in the Desert with a new clarity and sense of purpose to continue on our Jesus Movement mission to "Love one another as Christ loves us."*

*In last Sunday's Gospel, The Story of the Woman at the Well," one of the powerful images and lessons was that the Samaritan woman left her jug behind at the well. She engaged Jesus face to face and she left her old life, and her water jug, behind. We are challenged in these new times to also leave huge pieces of our old lives behind, as we continue to engage Jesus face to face, in response to our new social realities, and find new and exciting ways to live our All Saints Mission to Gather Transform and Send.*

*Blessed Ones, your Mutual Ministry Team, Bishops Committee and Staff continue to prayerfully engage each other and you, our Beloved Congregation, during these unsettled times. Please continue to reach out to one another and each day... Be A Blessing.*

*Always,  
Father Joe*