



The Shepherd's Staff

***Newsletter of the
Diocese of the Western States***

***Mid July
Special Edition***

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Synods Cancelled until 2021

Given the latest California shutdown of many businesses, indoor dining facilities and churches in most California counties, the Council of Bishops has decided to recommend the cancellation of the 2020 Synods until 2021. All the Bishops agree that this plague and its terror will not go away soon; and so, the Diocesan Synods for the Southwestern States, the Atlantic States, and the Western States have been postponed until 2021.

This decision to postpone the Synods has been disappointing and difficult. Last March, the Archbishop told us that *we all needed to be vigilant, not fearful; prepared, not anxious; aware, not desperate; generous, not hoarding; calm, not panicking; and use common sense as we acclimated to the new norm.* Nevertheless, with that said, it is out of concern for the safety of the faithful and their anxieties that the Bishops have come to this decision.

Therefore, our Western States' Diocesan Synod will be moved from September 23rd to 25th 2020 to April 21st to 23rd 2021. And note that these days will make the 2021 Synod fall a week earlier (after Good Shepherd Sunday – the Second Sunday after Easter) rather than our usual week following the Third Sunday after Easter.

The Board of Directors of the Corporation will meet soon (in August via Zoom) to pass a tentative budget which, along with the 2021 budget, will be ratified or modified at the 2021 Synod. Bishop Hansen and his parish will still host the 2021 Synod and those of us who have made Synod reservations will only need affirm our reservations to keep the same rates as last year. Nona and Bishop Hansen have contacted the hotels and the hotels will guarantee reservations already made, also at the same rate.

None of us has ever been through times as trying as these. And do not kid yourselves. The devil is on the rampage and his evil is palpable. But we shall laugh at him and triumph in God's good time with God's grace protecting us.

+dma

Good and Evil

When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong, they need your prayers all the more, and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house. C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Once upon a time a good and devout man was walking across a bridge over a deep gorge, when he came across another man standing on the rail, about to jump. He said 'Stop! don't do it!' 'Why not?' the second man said. The good man said, 'Well, there's so much to live for!' The latter said, 'Like what?' The good man said, 'Well... are you religious or atheist?' He said, 'I am quite religious.' The good man said, 'Me too! Are you a Christian?' He said, 'I am.' The good man said, 'Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?' He said, 'Protestant.' The good man said, 'Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?' He said, 'Baptist!' The good man said, 'What a happy coincidence. So am I. Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?' He said, 'Baptist Church of God!' The good man said, 'Amen! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?' He said, 'Reformed Baptist Church of God!' The good man said, 'Amen and Amen! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?' He said, 'Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915!' And the good man said, 'Die, Godless heretic!' and pushed him off the rail.

TO: Commander-in-Chief Spiritual Armed Forces, Jesus Christ

Dear Lord:

I am writing to You asking to be relieved from duty for the following reasons: I began my career as a confirmand, but, because of the intensity of the battle, you quickly moved me up in the ranks. You made me an ordained minister and gave me tremendous responsibilities. There are many parishioners and other clergy under my care. I am constantly being called upon to dispense wisdom, be patient, show mercy and tolerance and find solutions to increasingly difficult problems. I am called lazy, insensitive and a traitor by sheep who don't understand that your will is hard to understand and that material success is not your goal for us. Lord, I am just so tired of the fight. Sometimes, I can't even find headquarters. Sometimes I even despair in my repeated lapses into sin and failures to inspire your flock. I am tired of being an example when I am so shell-shocked.

I realize that you have promised to supply all I would need for the battle. But Sir, I must present You a realistic picture of my situation. My uniform, once so crisp and starched, is now stained with tears and blood from those I have tried to shepherd. The soles of my boots are cracked and worn from the miles I have walked trying to enlist, encourage, and instruct the sheep under my care. My weapons are marred, tarnished and chipped from constant battle against the enemy. Even the Book of Regulations I was issued has been torn and tattered from endless use. The words are now smeared.

You have promised you would be with me throughout, but when the noise of the battle is so loud and my confusion is so great, that I can neither see nor hear you, I feel so alone. I am so tired. I am so discouraged. I am lost in spiritual PTSD. I would never ask you for a discharge. I used to love being in Your service. But I humbly request a demotion and transfer – an extended leave from the army. I hurt so much; I am so confused. Just get me out of the battle -- please, Sir.

Your Faithful, but tired, Warrior.

I think this letter to the Commander-in-Chief reflects how many Christians feel every day, especially in this year of 2020 but really, ever since the rot of modernism began to infect the Church we loved and knew some seventy or more years ago. At yet, we still think that our Christian duties will get easier as we get older, but that is not the case. Consider the APCK. We were so confident back in 1978; we were so intoxicated by the righteousness of our cause. We knew we were a chosen

people! And we grew so fast! But, as time went by, many of our brothers and sisters were called back to headquarters. Some of us became fixated with the ABC (attendance, buildings, and cash) Syndrome and measured battlefield successes or failures (remember Job) by that standard instead of dependence on God's grace, personal sanctity and obedience to the will of our Blessed Saviour.

Think about it. Why is it that God so often denies us success where we expect it, but then later reveals to us how much success we have really accomplished? If you don't believe, come with me on my sick communions or to a graveside service.

And consider the most important weapon of our Christian warfare: compassion. We do our greatest work when we hold out the hand of tolerance and friendship when someone has let us down. How many times do we say, "how could you have..." instead of "are you O K?" or "can I help?" I remember Fr. Gilman who used to talk about the *Pioneer Syndrome*, about how people who had started great and noble tasks for Christ's church and the people of his church; how one day they just broke – call it battle fatigue or spiritual PTSD – and felt like they had done their share and were entitled to retire. I have seen it happen to teachers, parents, priests, parishioners, students – just about everybody. But often compassion brings them back! Often compassion is the tool that does not condone but heals. It is hard to use (I speak as a fool), but it can be a formidable weapon.

And then there is humility. When we get tired and are tempted to the Pioneer Syndrome ourselves, we need to remember that suffering and even just hanging on in our service as Christians keeps us humble. Consider how other people's pride and arrogance have hurt you; then consider how much the difficulties of life have kept you humble and then consider how humility brings you closer to God.

And finally consider endurance or suffering, which is one of God's principal means of conveying grace to his weary soldiers and servants. C. S. Lewis once observed that God is never more pleased than when a tired soldier, exhausted and weary, who has almost given up, to whom God's vision is almost completely blurred, continues, even though plagued by repeated sin, and bravely returns to his duties, to obey, just for Christ's sake.

TO: A Faithful, but tired, Soldier, Spiritual Armed Forces

LOCATION: The Battlefield, Hill of Calvary Station

SUBJECT: Transfer

Dear Soldier:

Your request for transfer has been denied; and for these reasons: You are needed in this battle. I have selected you, and I will keep My Word to supply your needs. You do not need a demotion and transfer. You need a period of "R & R" (Renewal and Rekindling). I am setting aside a place on the battlefield that is insulated and protected from the enemy. I will meet you there and I will give you rest. I will remove your old equipment and "make all things new." You will find this "R & R" in my tent (you call it a church), as you engage in worship, as you listen to my Word and receive the refreshment of the Sacrament of my Body and Blood.

You have been wounded in the battle. Well done, good and faithful servant. Your wounds are not visible, but you have received grave internal injuries. You need to be healed. I will heal you. Also, you have been weakened in the battle. You need to be strengthened. I will strengthen you and be your strength. I will instill in you confidence and ability. My Words will be rekindled within you, giving you renewed love, zeal and enthusiasm. Report to Me tattered and empty. I will replenish you.

Please never forget that in your weakness, I am glorified.

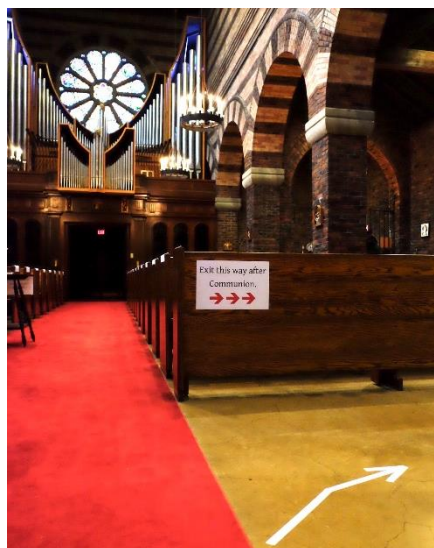
Compassionately,

Your Commander-in-Chief, Jesus Christ

The Parish of Saint Mark, Portland OR

Deacon Wilcox reports that Saint Mark's is closed to the general public, with services open to a limited number of parishioners. (Oregon limits gatherings to 25, though we've not exceeded 14 since that order became effective.) Parishioners are directed to remain at home if they are ill, and are encouraged to stay at home if they are at higher risk due to age or health issues. Those attending services are asked to let us know

beforehand so that we can remain within the Oregon limits and not turn anyone away. The pew racks have been emptied to avoid transmission via shared hymnals, etc. One entrance into the church is used, and parishioners are asked to apply hand sanitizer and pick up their service materials upon entering, and to deposit said materials in a bin as they leave. Bins are swapped weekly to allow virus particles to die before hymnals and prayer books are handled again. Masks are required and both disposable and handmade cloth masks are available at the door. Alternating pews are closed, and open pews are marked to maintain safe distances among parishioners. Likewise, members of the Altar party remain at least six feet apart as much as possible.



At Mass, Father Lillegard consecrates a Priests Host which is used for the Ecce

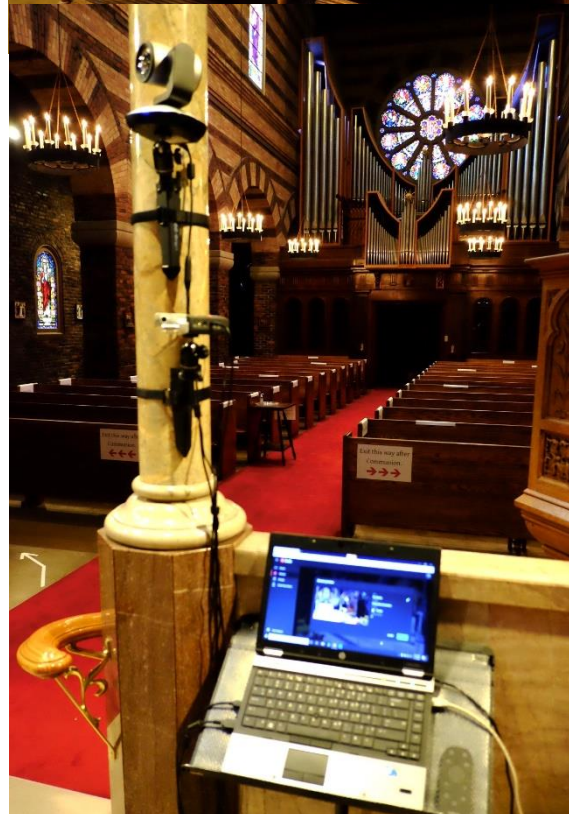
and his receiving. (At Deacon's Liturgies I use pre-consecrated Priests Hosts.) Pre-consecrated People's Hosts are distributed, and the Celebrant exits to wash his hands just prior to distribution. Those in the pews sanitize their hands before coming to the rail to receive, and only one person may occupy the Epistle or Gospel side of the rail at a time.



In June we returned to daily Morning and Evening Prayer and Mass/Deacon's Liturgy. The church is opened for all Masses and Liturgies and for about half of the

Offices, though other than Sunday we tend to have only one or two folks who live nearby in the pews. About half of these services are streamed on YouTube.

Viewership of the streamed services has not been great, but several parishioners have told us that they're grateful for the opportunity to be with us "online". There is a small group of women who meet weekly via Zoom for a variety of devotions (e.g., Stations of the Cross, Rosary, Jesus Prayer). I'm often at home when Jennifer is participating in these meetings, but I've chosen to not insert myself into their group as (from listening in) I can tell they're doing such an impressive job on their own.



Saint John the Baptist, Omaha NE

We at St. John's Omaha have been using social distancing in pews and during the reception of the Blessed Sacrament. We continue to provide Zoom recordings for those unable to attend mass. I have also driven to interested parishioners' homes, providing the sacrament directly to them. Father recently wrote this homily for the Third Sunday after Trinity.

This morning I would like to focus on two aspects from our Lessons. In the First Lesson, St. Peter instructs us on how we are to relate to each other. Our relationships with one another are to be rooted in humility and we are to seek the other's good in conjunction with our own. Sometimes, this involves an element of sacrifice where our own needs take a backseat. When we find ourselves in this situation, we are to cast all our care and even consternation on our God who not only created us, but came to earth and lived as one of us.

St. Peter assures us that God will honor this sacrifice and that our taking on humility will lead to our exultation before the Almighty. Why is this approach so important? Because it is essential to the well-being of the parish family and St. Peter goes on to warn us that turning our backs on this approach opens us to the control of the Evil One who is forever seeking the destruction of our souls.

Our Second Lesson from the Gospel of St. Luke illustrates for us, using parables, that all human beings are precious in God's sight. That can be tough on good churchmen who regularly live their faith and support the church while others live a worldly life that has no time for the practice of faith. But, we are reminded that the lost sheep are indeed the missing piece of silver not only needed by the church, but are to be welcomed upon repentance.

When I read through these two Lessons what came to my mind was this question: What about the truth and how are we to defend it and share the good news of the Christian Faith? Are we to be cynical and join with Pontius Pilate when he said to our Lord before condemning him to death, "What is truth?"

Should we dissemble the truth before a hostile person or audience? God forbid. But we cannot let the way we witness to the truth defeat our message. It is essential that we remember, especially at this time in our Nation and World, that emotions are not truth or facts and that the truthful facts of our Faith are these: Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again.

Our earthly pilgrimage is fraught with dangers and adversities that can take on as many forms as there are human beings. The Collect and Lessons for this Sunday are clear on this. How do we muddle through? St. Paul declares to us in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that we are to walk by faith and not by sight. This is not some pie in the sky philosophy. What this reveals is that the true meaning of our lives is hid in the reality of Jesus Christ. The world cannot see this or understand it because it is faithless.

So, let us rejoice with one another that we can gather this Sunday morning and pray together. Let's keep our focus on building up the body of Christ, His Church and not sow seeds of discord or hurt one another by our self-righteousness. When we have the opportunity to share our Faith, don't avoid the "hard questions" and if you don't know the answer, be humble and say so that the conversation may continue.

I close with this marvelous quote from St. John XXIII. Keep in mind that here was a very powerful man whose word was essentially law in the Roman Church: As Pope his approach to his ministry was this: "See everything. Correct a little. Overlook a lot."

Robert F. Ponec+

[Father Ponec wears many hats right now. In addition to his duties as Rector of Saint John the Baptist parish in Omaha, he is priest-in-charge of Saint Bartholomew's in Woodinville WA where he visits once a month to minister to the parish – and he is our Suffragan Bishop elect. Keep him in your prayers.]

Around the Diocese



Upper left, Father Richard Andrews gives the final blessing at All Saints', Cheyenne, Wyoming
Upper right, Father Robert Greene preaching the sermon at Church of Our Saviour, Los Angeles
Lower right, the Bishop pronounces the Committal at the Funeral of Father John Pennington in Redmond OR
Please remember his widow Gretchen and daughter Erin in your prayers
Lower left, lunch at the Powderhorn in Grants Pass OR: l to right, Bishop Ashman, Gillian Golden (our ACW President), Claudia Baker, Father David La Barbera, Erin Salazar and Steve Sherman.

Arise!

You once wanted to be somebody when you grew up. Who was it? I don't mean a profession—fireman, nurse, police officer, teacher, space explorer—but the kind of man or woman that filled that role, who lived the heroic life.

Batman, Superman, Captain America, and Spiderman were our superheroes. The strength to bend a steel beam, fly like a jet, stop a locomotive, or crumple bad guys were all handy abilities. Some super characters were themselves evil. But Superman only did right. It was from goodness that his power sprang.

Have you ever thought of yourself in superhero terms? Have you imagined yourself saving somebody from imminent danger? Do you instead feel like a wimp in the face of evil? If such strength were given to you to change the world for better, would you do it? If such power existed in you, would you want to know what that power is, and how you should put it to use?

Great suffering abounds—people's homes are sometimes valued less than their mortgages, millions have been put out of work by the coronavirus, people are sick with diseases that can't be explained or cured. The decline in morale is the true pandemic. Who can stand against it? St. Paul wrote that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us... the manifestation of the sons of God." [Romans 8:18-19](#) Could you be a son or daughter of God?

I once fought the notion of Christ being my model for living because He's perfect and I'm not; He's God and I surely am not; He's not married and I am; etc. There really is no such excuse. God the Son died in my place, gave His life for me, and I make excuses. St. Paul again says, "be renewed in the spirit of your mind ... put on the new man." [Eph 4:23-24](#)

Like Spiderman, who discovers he can fling webbing and swing above the boulevards of the metropolis, or Superman who jumps in the air to find himself faster than a speeding bullet. A renewed mind and a new nature create in each of us a powerful new human being. We aren't just better people: we have "put on the new man." [Col 3:9](#)

When we were mere servants of sin, we couldn't exhibit God's power. Now, in a changed life, what is possible? Courage, little ones. Don't be afraid: but you are sitting in a room full of warriors. Forgiveness for sins past is only the beginning: you now can forgive others—a key that unlocks prison doors, changes hearts, and bestows freedom. You now have that power. You possess the power to be a source of life to others around you, giving in abundance is your super power. Do you doubt it?

Nothing is impossible for God. He, and now you, can bring peace, He, and now you, may settle disputes. Healing now flows from your hand to mend the bleeding lives of those who are just as you were, as we all were. Truth has set you free and now you speak the loving truth that dispels lies.

Whatever God can accomplish, His power resides in you. His potential for supernatural strength, superhuman energy, knowledge, wisdom, holiness, and the apprehension of God's greatness and powerful presence are totally and fully realized inside you. Get out of the nest and fall, flail, then fly.

Now, don't jump off any roofs. No cape will save you, no tights or mask or equipment belt needed for this. We do heroic things in street clothes, and hidden under this ordinary camouflage ripple such muscular Christian soldiers, warriors for the great battle, magnificent men and women, stronger than steel, truer than the arrow's flight, faster than thought, and ruled by love: we stand in the sun's last rays, our capes flowing in the breeze. New man, new woman, arise!



John Roderick Christensen, Nona Gourley's great-grandson was baptized on July 11 by Father Larry Shaddix at the home of his great aunt Margaret Montgomery in Newman CA.

On the next day, the Bishop confirmed Deena Orr and received Vida Wolter at Saint Luke's Redding.

News, Notes and Prayers

- As we begin to reopen, please remember that the safety of our parish families is of the utmost importance. It may be that some of our parishes (like mine in Los Angeles) will temporarily shut down at certain times due to spikes in the virus rates. The one bright spot in this pestilence has been the effective use our clergy have made of Zoom and other media to keep our parish families connected.
- Please keep Belinda McNeely, the wife of Chancellor Richard McNeely, in special prayer. Mrs. McNeely is finally home from the hospital after her fall while walking her dogs but still has a long (perhaps year-long) convalesce ahead of her.
- Father David La Barbera of Saint Jude's Grants Pass had surgery for kidney stones on July 16th. He is home and in great spirits. As he said, *the doctor's laser beam blasted that evil stone to sand*.
- I just received a call from Debra Ponec telling me that Father Ponec is hospitalized with sepsis. Sepsis (a blood infection that almost killed Father Herb last year) is very serious. Please pray for Father and Deb.
- Please also remember Father Boyd Britton (my vicar in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara) who is recovering from foot surgery after a persistent infection.
- Pray for John our Archbishop who underwent ankle surgery on July 17th. He is home and all seems to be going along grandly.
- Deacon Michael Ruffino of Saint Chad's Anglican Mission in Colorado has had a successful knee replacement and is recovering nicely and about to start physical therapy. BUT on June 29th, Deacon Ruffino's wife, Susan, appeared to suffer a mild to severe stroke. Later the doctors said it was not a stroke. Susan is now home and recovering. Please keep Susan and Deacon Ruffino in your prayers.
- And please pray for Peter our Suffragan Bishop along with the priests and deacons of our Diocese. They are under great stress and they need your prayers and support. Pray for those who despair and struggle to find the gifts of Faith, Hope and Charity in these troubled times. Pray for each other. Pray for the Church, the unity of God's People, Peace, Social Justice, those who seek Holy Orders, those who have died in the service of our Country, along with the sick (especially those struck down with COVID19), the suffering, the friendless, and the needy.

The Last Word

Ultimately in every life there comes a time when we decide to go our own way or to choose Christ. This is the choice we are given with the gift of free will. To choose Christ is to love Him and others more than pleasure, power, or self. The saints tell us have heart, do not be afraid. Choose Christ. Take hold of reality. If you give in to fantasy you will become a phantom.

"Late have I loved Thee," St. Augustine writes of his wasted time. "God is love," writes St. John, but God is not a substitute for love. To love God means to forgive the brutal, the cruel, and the indifferent, to forgive the pockmarked egos we confront daily, in others and in ourselves. We forgive others so that we might be forgiven.

To love God means to ceaselessly give of ourselves, without being crippled by greed or constrained by envy. To love God is to know that we must lovingly surrender to God all that we are, all that we were, and all that we have. We have no fear of death, for it is the way to God.

Sometimes in worship there comes suddenly, when we are unprepared, a dazzling light. It breaks through our darkness and, for a moment, we see everything transfigured, radiant, and personal. St. Paul writes, "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

You are called to serve God in your life. Are you doing what you feel intuitively God asks of you? It is true, as St. Augustine writes, "Late have I loved Thee," but it is never too late to serve God.

+Robert Sherwood Morse