



Welcome to HOLY FAMILY PARISH

APRIL 9, 2020 – HOLY THURSDAY – YEAR A

Email: contact@holyfamilymh.ca ~ Website: www.holyfamilymh.ca ~ Facebook: Medicine Hat Holy Family Parish

HOLY WEEK 2020 - Prayer & Adoration - Thursday 8:30am to 7:00pm, Good Friday,
Saturday & Easter Sunday - 9:00am to 4:30pm Reconciliation: By Appointment Only 403-527-6933 ext 101
Office Hrs. Monday to Friday - 8:30am – 12:00pm & 1:00pm to 4:30pm - Closed on Holidays

EMPTY ALTAR

Today we begin Holy Triduum which brings us to the solemn celebrations of the Holy Week. During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis everything is a mess. This is the first time that Holy Triduum will be celebrated without the congregation. How painful it is not only for the clergy but for the faithful all over the world. In the Church whenever I pass by the Holy Altar it gives me heartache to see the empty altar and the pews in the church. I remember: There was a time when everyday Holy Mass was celebrated on the Altar to remind us that we need to give thanks to the Lord for the great sacrifice he offered for us on the Cross to save us. There was a time when the faithful used to gather for prayer and share the sign of peace with each other. There was a time when everyone in the congregation used stop to greet and to find out how things are with them. There was a time when people used to gather in the parish hall to share fellowship. There was a time when people used to laugh and cry with each other. There was a time when people used to ask how their day was going to be like. There was a time when people used to wish each other “have a wonderful day”. Alas, everything is gone somewhere and it seems things are not coming back to normal soon. This situation is inviting us to reflect on the words of the Psalmist (137): *“By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right-hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!” O daughter Babylon, you, devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock”.*

The empty altar is reminding us that we need to seek the Lord more than ever because he didn’t leave us alone. We need to have the attitude of Ruth: *“Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” (Ruth 1:16-17).*

Today during the Last Supper of the Lord a few things have taken place and those keep reminding us that the Altar will never be empty even if there is no Holy Mass celebrated literally:

1. The desire of Jesus “it was my desire to have supper with you before the Passover”. He is with us even when we share our meals at homes because he sits with us to remind us how to share ourselves with others.
2. Even he knows that someone is going to betray him but still he loves. Sometimes we do betray him when we go astray from his teaching, but he loves us so much that he is ready to lay down his life for our sins. “there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”.
3. The institution of the Sacred Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders are such miracles that they will never be forgotten. These two sacraments keep opening our insights to understand how close Jesus is to us. ***“But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God” (Hebrews 9:11-14).*** He is our priest forever in the order of the Melchizedek of old.
4. He has offered himself for our sake and wants us to “do this in memory of me”. ***“Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).***
5. He served everyone in humility and love. By washing the feet of his disciples, he has given the greatest lesson of service without seeking our own pleasure or reward. St. Melito of Sardis, Bishop writes a beautiful word: “There was much proclaimed by the prophets about the mystery of the Passover: that mystery is Christ, and to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. For the sake of our suffering humanity, he came down from heaven to earth, clothed himself in that humanity in the Virgin’s womb, and was

born a man. Having then a body capable of suffering, he took the pain of fallen man upon himself; he triumphed over the diseases of soul and body that were its cause, and by his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man's destroyer, death, a fatal blow. It is he who was made man of the Virgin, he who was hung on the tree; it is he who was buried in the earth, raised from the dead, and taken up to the heights of heaven. He is the mute lamb, the slain lamb, the lamb born of Mary, the fair ewe. He was seized from the flock, dragged off to be slaughtered, sacrificed in the evening, and buried at night. On the tree no bone of his was broken; in the earth his body knew no decay. He is the One who rose from the dead, and who raised man from the depths of the tomb”.

Let's during this crisis look not at the Empty Altar but at Jesus who suffered, died and rose from the dead to give us eternal life. He himself was obedient to death even death on a cross to save us from the snare of death. He does not forget us *“But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.” Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me” (Isaiah 49:14-16).* May the Lord help us to be faithful to him and serve him wholeheartedly. Amen

