

HOMILY ~ SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME FEBRUARY 18-19, 2023

I hope and pray that this will be the year that we really come out of COVID and find our new normal. Although we all lived through COVID, I think we have to acknowledge that we all have different experiences and are at different places in terms of our comfort levels. Some lost loved ones due to COVID or other causes and were unable to have funerals and rituals at that time that would give us comfort. Some were very sick and survived; some still have long term symptoms. We all experienced that fear of that threat that we did not know how to prevent or treat. We learned to be afraid of one another because you can make me sick. We all had social isolation when we needed closeness, some longer than others. Some of our children were out of school for extended periods of time. Some had loved ones who were very vulnerable that we worried about.

We all had some of our social support systems ripped away from us when we needed them the most. We were unable to come together at church when we needed it the most. We had that low level of stress that lasted for years and into the present. Some lost jobs and businesses. Is it any wonder that we are struggling with anxiety, depression and adjustments problems? We are all at different places because of our different experiences, so no judgment. If you still feel that you need to isolate, this may be the time to get some input from your doctor to see if it is necessary. We do not want to get stuck in the trauma. We can become more resilient if we have strong social support and have a sense of purpose in our lives. I think church can play a role in helping us to become more resilient. We can give that social support to one another and caring for one another gives our life purpose.

In the First Reading today, we hear that we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. In the Gospel, Jesus calls us to love our enemies. Jesus speaks a lot about love. That call to unconditional love for our neighbor underlies everything we are called to be as Catholics. This week Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. We can see Lent as a new beginning for our spiritual lives and hopefully a step toward finding our new normal. Our theme for Lent is "*Connect With Us.*" At St. Edith, we would like to be that support network that we need now; and we would like to help people find their sense of purpose. Social interaction and social engagement provide comfort in two ways. First of all, it gives us a sense of belonging, being part of a group, and this helps us to feel accepted and validated. Secondly, it gives us a sense of security.

There are so many things going on in the world that make us feel threatened and fearful. My hope is that St. Edith is a place where everyone can feel safe, secure, welcomed and accepted. I invite everyone to invite people to become connected with us at St. Edith. Invite people to come to Mass or to any of the groups and activities we have going here. If you know people who are uncomfortable in large groups, invite them to participate in a small group activity. Maybe pick them up and come with them. That will help them to feel more at ease. Make sure that people know that everyone belongs at St. Edith.

During Lent, we focus upon the three pillars of *Lent: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving*. Give it some thought over the next couple of days and see what you want to do during Lent in these areas. I am going to suggest that you pray for someone every day who may be struggling with the post COVID depression, anxiety or isolation. Joining with someone spiritually can help them. In the area of fasting, I suggest that you limit the time you spend with the news and on social media. That in itself will decrease depression and anxiety. Replace social media with physical social interactions. The social distancing during COVID robbed us of our ability to be physically close to one another. We need to feel another's presence, to share space with them, to touch them and look into their eyes. In the area of almsgiving, I suggest that you do at least one act of kindness each day. It does not have to be something big. Give someone a compliment, show your gratitude, notice the good things that others do, thank someone, welcome the new guy, smile at someone, let someone go in front of you in line, sign up to volunteer.

Connect With Us during Lent, and help others to do the same. It is time to move out of COVID and into our new normal.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim