



Tacoma, Washington
The Fifth Week in Lent 2020

**IT'S NOT ABOUT ME BUT ABOUT US:
FRIDAYS DURING AND AFTER THE TIME OF PANDEMIC**
Fr. Samuel Torvend

By the beginning of the second century, Christians were keeping Fridays as days of fasting with prayer focused on the suffering and death of Jesus. Two early Christian writings - *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and *On Fasting* by the early Christian lawyer Tertullian – invited Christians to keep such a fast with prayer every Friday throughout the year. What entails a fast? Christians may have one meal during the day with two small snacks at other times, usually a fruit or vegetable.

Yet the point of keeping a fast with prayer is not to mortify the body and it certainly is not a technique for weight loss. *Limiting one's consumption of food is intended to save funds that can be shared with those in need.* The early Christian bishop Augustine of Hippo pointed to this sharing in one of his Lenten sermons:

"Let us give alms and deeds of kindness all the more lavishly and all the more frequently on every Friday of the year and throughout the season of Lent out of gratitude for the mercy that has been offered us by Christ. Fasting and prayer without kindness and acts of mercy is worth nothing." (*Sermon 207*) And let us add: fasting and prayer that lead to charitable assistance and the works of justice are worth something to our neighbors in need.

The early Christian historian Rodney Stark formerly of the University of Washington, writes that during two pandemics – in 165 and in 250 – early Christians did not flee to the safety of private homes in the hills; they did not care for themselves alone. Rather they promoted efforts to supply the sick and needy with food, drink, companionship, and rudimentary nursing care – practices which made a significant difference in recovery rates. When asked why they extended their care to everyone, not just Christians, Bishop Dionysius said this: "Our faith in God compels us to extend the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus to anyone – anyone – in peril. We are his nurses in this time of dread. Though we cherish life for it is God's gift to us, we have no fear of death for it leads us to the City of God, the New Jerusalem."

The contemporary Christian artist He Qi (pronounced *hwo chee*) clearly expresses the relationship between the suffering of Christ and those who suffer in society. In the image below, he does this by juxtaposing the crucified Christ with conditions of suffering: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me



something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25:35-36) Where are we to find Christ today? Why, among those who call out for food, drink, shelter, clothing, companionship, and medical care.

Thus the keeping of every Friday and Good Friday as the commemoration of the innocent suffering of Jesus at the hands of a violent empire can open Christians to expand care beyond the self or one's kin and join in the project to alleviate suffering in the Name of Jesus, our Healer and our Liberator from oppressive conditions that dehumanize.

What, then, can be done?

1. In that time and space we call daily **prayer**, consider how you might support others in need at this time – through prayer, calling or emailing, contributions, or running errands and doing so safely. Consider this prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ,
By your death you have taken away the sting of death
And have given us strength to face the perils that surround us.
Grant to us, your servants, the wisdom and will
To serve our sisters and brothers
And so let our faith take flesh in word and deed.
Amen.*

2. Christ Church deacon Gen Grewell is coordinating a group of parishioners who are able to **assist parishioners in need with food and medications or a ride to a medical appointment**. To join the group, contact Gen at ggrewell@ecww.org (email preferred) or call her cellphone: 360-280-5593.

3. Mother Janet is eager to receive donations for **the Rector's Discretionary Fund**, donations that enable her to assist parishioners in great need of material assistance at this time. Should you have the resources, generous gifts – but gifts of any size – can be donated online at the parish website (<https://christchurchtacoma.org/>) or by sending a check to the Parish Office made out to Christ Church with designation *Rector's Discretionary Fund*.

4. Concerning **the homeless** who have little if any support in this time of pandemic, and **those who could be evicted** from their homes in less than month, parishioner Sean Horner writes: "You might have already seen and signed this petition to Mayor Woodards, Tacoma City Council members, Pierce County Council members, and State Representatives. If you live in Pierce County and haven't signed, please consider doing so, and share it with your family and friends: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/tacoma-and-pierce-county-we-need-an-eviction-and-foreclosure-moratorium>."

5. At any time but particularly during a time of distress, *hoarding is a sin* against one's neighbor, especially the most vulnerable and all who continue to provide food, medical assistance, and safety. We are under strict restrictions to stay home, a ruling that does not prevent us from **checking in with a neighbor** in an apartment complex or on one's block and asking on the telephone, via email, or *at a safe distance of more than six (6) feet* – if they need food or hygienic products. If so, such products can be *shared safely by leaving them in a plastic bag at the door*.



6. People need food now more than ever in this time when many are laid off from work without pay and have to make the terrible decision between rent and food. Your donation to **Emergency Food Network** enables this terrific organization to distribute bulk foods to the many food pantries throughout the region. Contact them at <https://www.efoodnet.org/>.

7. The American **Red Cross of South Puget Sound** needs life-saving blood. The U.S. Surgeon General writes, "We're worried about potential blood shortages in the near future. Social distancing does not have to mean social disengagement." Contact the Red Cross at <https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/dlp/coronavirus--covid-19--and-blood-donation.html>

Image 1: He Qi, "The Crucifixion" 1999

Image 2: John Reilly, "Jesus feeding the 5000," 1958