Dear friends:

Today’s readings from the lectionary are very familiar ones to us: the healing of a crippled man by Peter in the name of Jesus, Psalm 105 – Let all who seek the Lord rejoice – and the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35). As “Renewing the Promise” reminds us, our lives are about relationship, about opportunities for accompaniment: we are invited by Jesus to be accompanied by him and we, in turn, invite others including our students and colleagues to let us accompany them.

In these challenging times, it is more difficult for us to “accompany”; however, we do have the benefit of technology which wasn’t available during other pandemics. The first landline public telephone (invented by Alexander Graham Bell of Brantford in 1876) in Canada was installed by Bell Canada in Lancefield’s Stationery Store in Hamilton on February 1st 1881; however, it was not until the 1920's that those other than businesses and the very wealthy could afford one. With that in mind, most of the people affected by the great ‘flu’ epidemic in 1918 would not have had access to a telephone to call the doctor or other help. It is noteworthy that Canadians led the use of the telephone until the Second World War, at which time its use expanded considerably. I grew up in a home in Scotland which had no electricity (we used gas lighting such as one sees in visits to historic homes) and the nearest telephone was a call box on the corner relied upon by several hundred households. There was a special jar of threepenny bits kept just for telephone calls and for your “thruppence” you got three minutes; the ‘pips’ would sound to warn you that you had about ten seconds and then the line would go dead unless you put another coin in. At a time when
the average wage was about £1 per day and fourpence bought a litre of fuel, one didn't waste money on calls unless it was essential; you went to visit. When I lived just north of Georgetown in the late sixties, the ‘phone was a “party line” shared by five families and we each had a special ring – ours was two-shorts-and-a-long. People who were sufficiently bored could listen to their neighbours’ calls so one had to be a bit careful about what one said on the ‘phone.

Today we take our mobile ‘phones and smartphones so much for granted that we may have forgotten how to really accompany: there is nothing like the sound of a real person’s voice – and no, I don’t mean the poor telemarketer from Mumbai who is trying to promote duct cleaning! There may be people with whom you haven’t spoken in a while, who live alone, are isolated right now and would live to hear a familiar voice. Older people especially may not have the technology – or knowledge of it – to use Facetime or Skype or such an app and would love to have their ‘phone ring to hear a friendly voice at the other end. Get out your old telephone list and put it to work.

To continue the telephone analogy, we need to remember that God calls us all the time and is often left on “hold” or “call waiting”. Christian Meditation is a great way to open that line of communication and, if you have lost the connection you can find information on the Learn at Home site on the Board Web page: in the drop-down menu on the right you will find Faith Resources; there is a button for Christian Meditation at the bottom of that page.
Further to the information I sent out earlier about the liberation of Bergen-Belsen 75 years ago, you may appreciate this link from our friend, Dr Murray Watson, Faith Animator for the Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board:

https://twitter.com/SMCDSB_Faith/status/1250372183081259008?s=20

You may also enjoy this reflection from a Trappist on the contemplative life:

https://mepkinabbey.org/a-contemplative-confinement-for-the-layperson/

A reflection for the day from Father Richard Rohr:

The Universal Pattern

The Prayer of Francis and Clare
Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Both St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) and St. Clare (1194–1253) let go of their fear of suffering; any need for power, prestige, and possessions; and any need for their small self to be important. By doing so they came to know who they really were in God—and thus who they objectively were.

Such a profound ability to change is often the fruit of suffering and various forms of poverty. The small self does not surrender without a fight to its death. If we understand suffering to be whenever we are not in control, then we see why some form of suffering
is absolutely necessary to teach us how to live beyond the illusion of control and to give that control back to God and the flow of reality.

This counterintuitive insight surely explains why these two medieval dropouts—Francis and Clare—tried to invite us all into their happy run downward, to that place of “poverty” and powerlessness where all of humanity finally dwells anyway. They voluntarily leapt into the very fire from which most of us are trying to escape, with total trust that Jesus’ way of the cross could not, and would not, be the wrong path.

By God’s grace, they believed that they could trust the eventual passing of all things, and where they were passing to. They did not wait for liberation later—after death—but grasped it here and now.

Franciscan Sister Ilia Delio writes:
[Francis’] life indicates to us that if we persevere in prayer we will find God in the center of our lives and the bitter will become sweet [as when Francis kissed the leper]; however, if we stay on the plain of mediocrity then the bitter may remain bitter. To trust in the power of God’s grace through darkness, isolation, bitterness, and rejection is to be on the way to becoming prayer because it is the way to freedom in God. For prayer, that deep relationship of God breathing in us, requires change and conversion. And where there is change, there is the letting go of the old and the giving birth to the new. To pray is to be open to the new, to the future in God. The way to life passes through change and ultimately the change from death to life. Prayer is the way to life because in prayer we are invited to change and to grow in love. [1]

I find myself in prayer much of the time right now, not simply because of the limitations of our current circumstances, but because I want to be a witness to such divine freedom. I believe it is this kind of prayer that may keep us from simply hoping things quickly return to “normal” (though that is a comforting thought to many) and instead praying for the courage to “change and grow in love.” Such courage is surely what we and the world truly need.

(From the Center for Action and Contemplation: https://cac.org )
Saint for the Day: another model for those who teach!

Blessed Caesar de Bus (February 3, 1544 – April 15, 1607)

Like so many of us, Caesar de Bus struggled with the decision about what to do with his life. After completing his Jesuit education he had difficulty settling between a military and a literary career. He wrote some plays but ultimately settled for life in the army and at court.

For a time, life was going rather smoothly for the engaging, well-to-do young Frenchman. He was confident he had made the right choice. That was until he saw firsthand the realities of battle, including the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacres of French Protestants in 1572.

He fell seriously ill and found himself reviewing his priorities, including his spiritual life. By the time he had recovered, Caesar had resolved to become a priest. Following his ordination in 1582, he undertook special pastoral work: teaching the catechism to ordinary people living in neglected, rural, out-of-the-way places. His efforts were badly needed and well received.

Working with his cousin, Caesar developed a program of family catechesis. The goal—to ward off heresy among the people—met the approval of local bishops. Out of these efforts grew a new religious congregation: the Fathers of Christian Doctrine.

One of Caesar’s works, Instructions for the Family on the Four Parts of the Roman Catechism, was published 60 years after his death.

He was beatified in 1975. (https://www.franciscanmedia.org/blessed-caesar-de-bus/)

You will find Bishop Crosbie’s Easter Message at the end of today’s edition.

May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within.
May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire, so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.
And may light shine out of the two eyes of you, like a candle set in the window of a house, bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.
And may the blessing of the rain be on you, may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean, and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines, and sometimes a star.
And may the blessing of the earth be on you, soft under your feet as you pass along the roads, soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day; and may it rest easy over you when, at last, you lie out under it.
May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly; up and off and on its way to God.
And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly. Amen.

Scottish Blessing

Until tomorrow,

Gillian
Bishop Crosby’s Easter Message

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of the Risen Lord Jesus! This Easter message arrives amidst the seemingly unending news cycle we have all experienced over the past weeks. At times, despite the positive stories we hear, this news has been harrowing and frightening. However, I write to you today to implore you, most especially in this Easter Season: Do not allow this bad news to obscure your vision of the Good News of Christ! We cannot allow the darkness of the present moment to cast a shadow on our vision of the light of Christ’s Resurrection! Indeed, the Resurrection is what transforms the darkness of Good Friday, the suffering of the innocent Christ, and the desolation of the Cross. As followers of Jesus we know there is no Easter without the Cross. And yet the Cross always points toward the glory of the Resurrection and God’s ultimate victory over death. Our suffering can point toward salvation as well, if we unite it to the One who suffered all for us.

We may sense a contradiction to the Easter feast this year: how can our celebration and joy be complete when the world is locked-down, isolated, quarantined – when we cannot even gather in our parish churches to celebrate the Solemnity of solemnities? What do we make of this suffering that remains even after the tomb has been found empty and the Risen Lord appeared?

The Easter story provides the definitive example of how God gives meaning to suffering. Through the Lord’s suffering and death, we are liberated from death’s grasp. The Lord will also transform the difficulties of today into profound grace – but we must allow Him to do so. We must open ourselves to the Lord’s voice, and allow ourselves to be instruments of His love when it is so desperately needed.

How can we do this? The foundational way is prayer. The rhythm of our prayer life has been upended in these days, most painfully through the absence of the faithful at Sunday Mass. But our prayer must continue. I encourage you to read the daily scripture readings, to pray the Rosary and other devotions, to watch the Mass being broadcast on television or the internet, making an act of spiritual communion. Pray for your families, for your parish, for healthcare workers, for our political leaders, for those who are sick, and for those who are dying. We must also remember not only to focus on our trials, but to be thankful for our continued blessings. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (Thess. 5: 16-18)

We also open ourselves to the Lord when we do good. While we will not be able to make all things well, we can follow the example of St. Teresa of Calcutta to, “do small things with great love.” Grow closer to your family and loved ones, being gentle and patient with them during this time together. Call on family, friends, neighbours, and the vulnerable. Help those in need as you are able. Make sacrifices to promote the common good and ensure others have what they need. Remember: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Our parishes and pastors will continue to be here for you during this time. Our priests continue to celebrate Mass for your intentions and, like me, they anxiously await your return to worship at the table of the Lord. Sadly, our parishes are sharing in the damage of the measures to contain the virus. If you are able, continuing to support your parish financially will help them overcome this ordeal. Financial uncertainties abound, and we must ensure we take care of our families; not everyone will be able to maintain their giving. However, our parishes are vitally important, and the support of the faithful is what sustains them. I know Divine Providence directs us at this time and always, and I know those who can will do their part.
The Easter story solidifies the triumph of light over darkness, the victory of life over death, and the culmination of God’s breaking into history to bring each of us to Himself. We know that the suffering of this present moment cannot separate us from God’s love. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) While we may be separated from one another, Christ remains close to us. I pray for health, well-being, and peace for you and your family, and wish you an abundance of Easter blessings. May the Easter Alleluia resound in your heart, until such time as it rings out once again from the gathered assembly in the house of God!

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Ex corde, + Douglas, OMI

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI Bishop of Hamilton

Solemnity of Easter 2020