A Message of Hope:

Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, we are all being forced to slow way down. Although it is stressful to have our comfortable routines disrupted, to be isolated from our loved ones, and worry that our jobs, financial security and, yes, basic survival are being threatened, slowing down might be good for us! In this adjustment time, we have an opportunity to grow in awareness of one another, kindness toward one another, patience, understanding, charity, and even joy.  This is a time that God calls upon us to rethink the way we live our lives. He is calling us to reconsider our priorities and not to chase the allure of material things and excitement, addicted to activities and mindless distractions, We are being called upon, now more than ever, to focus on one another and our communities with a charitable, patient and forgiving heart, and to focus on our faith in the Lord, with hope and steadfastness. As we slow things down, we can take time to reflect on the belief that God will provide, and if we seek him he will shed light and meaning to our hardships, and can turn suffering into joy. The COVID-19 crisis brings us to the stark realization that we are not the masters of our own destiny, and can teach us that not only do we have to take care of our bodies, but our interior lives, our souls. Jesus tells us in the Gospel, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life” John 6:27. So even when our simplest of freedoms are seized, our freedom to walk around as we want, our dinners out, attend Mass and receive Holy Communion, we can find comfort in knowing that a solid interior life, with mind and heart fixed on Christ, fortified by our faith, has prepared us for this and every challenge we are to face.Let us take this as an opportunity to open our hearts, ears and eyes to the opportunities God presents us with to strength our interior life and build hearts of flesh, so we can be better shepherds of His will.

So during this time of fear, uncertainty, and “social distancing,” here are some things we can do to focus our minds and hearts on God and fortify our faith:

**Devotion TO the APOSTLES’ TEACHING**

With the current digital age we live in, solid Bible teaching is not hard to find. Between podcasts, church sermons, videos, etc., there is an abundance of faith based teachings to turn to. But also, go right to the source: The Bible and the direct teachings of the Apostles. In other words, spend some time each day reading God’s word.

**FELLOWSHIP**

**Gather:** Embrace this unique time by gathering witha few friends and family, via FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc., to worship in small groups together. Imagine the joy and comfort of being intimate with the Lord and other disciples of his ministry. The early church did this and so can we. It will decrease feelings of isolation and offer meaningful connection.

**Make an intentional effort to reach out to others:** call people, video chat, write letters and emails, and use social media sparingly to post uplifting messages of care, compassion and hope. People are reaching out, longing for inspiration and connection from others around them. This is especially true for those who lost, marginalized or alone. Gather together with family members and others living in your household. Remember the fruits of the spirit are gifts from God and were meant to be grown. As humans we were created for connection.

**Use the gifts God gave you to share and create**. The world needs your gifts. Think of creative ways to use them. This can help you feel more productive and useful but most importantly it can help others.

**Sing.** Your voice is a reflection for God’s abundant hope and glory. Use it.

**Pray together.**“For where two or three are gathered together, God is there.” Matthew 18:20

**SHARING IN MEALS**

The early church took every opportunity for communion because it served to remind us of the sacrifice Jesus made for them on the cross. Take this time to prepare and share meals together. It can serve not only as a reminder of the God’s boundless love for us but also as an opportunity to feel the soothing joy and comfort of being nourished with others.

### ****PRAYER****

The COVID-19 crisis reminds us that we cannot control all things around us. Remember and find comfort in the knowledge that God is in control. In times of hardship, uncertainly and social isolation, our focus should not be on consuming more goods than our share, seeking more information, or absorbing more news and social media, it should be on prayer. Maintain our focus on hearts and minds on God. Keep our interior life strong. Keep prayer simple so you can integrate it into daily living. Pray for more faith, health, our family members, pastors, and government officials. Pray for the poor and the vulnerable populations. Pray for a heart of flesh that seeks a closer relationship with God and a deeper desire for His Word.

Remember that the COVID-19 crisis will end. As we pray for our leaders, have faith that the Lord is guiding our President and the team he has assembled. Have faith that with the collaborative efforts of our great scientists, the courage of our first responders, and the unwavering strength and patriotism of our nation, we will conquer this crisis together, and our country will rebound even stronger. We are one great nation, under God.