

The 'Lentiest Lent ever' might also be the most profound



It's challenging enough, even for the most faithful Catholics among us, to keep our Lenten commitments. We're all busy, and just the everyday juggling acts of trying to balance faith, family and work often can lead to forgetting to do that daily Rosary or to attend daily Mass as we promised the Lord we would do this time around. Those types of challenges are what we're used to facing during Lent. Sometimes we take on more than we can handle, spirituality-wise. But as an oldie but goodie reminds us, we "pick ourselves up, brush ourselves off, and start all over again" with the best of efforts and intentions.

Those common discouragements or missteps during our Lenten journey pale in comparison to Lent 2020. This Lent, no doubt, is being seen not only as one of the most unique Lenten seasons in Church history, but also one of the most difficult. It's been one for the record books.

I recently saw a great phrase making the rounds on social media platforms – a phrase that really summarizes what we experienced. Lent 2020 was referred to as the "Lentiest Lent ever." I'm pretty sure "Lentiest" isn't exactly a word we would find in the dictionary, but it should be. For starters who would have ever thought it would be even remotely possible that all the churches in Rome, including St. Peter's Basilica, would actually close their doors? Next on the list, thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, were the churches in the Holy Land. The last time the Holy Sepulcher Church, built on the site of Golgotha as well as our Lord's tomb, was closed was nearly 700 years ago during the Black Plague. And last but not least was

the devastating action moving throughout the Catholic Church in the United States and the rest of the world as one bishop after another had to make the heartbreaking decision to cancel public Masses, funeral Masses, baptisms and, for the most part, pretty much all activities that involved 10 or more people (which is just about every activity in our Catholic communities).

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Personally speaking, our family had to really “let go and let God” when we learned that we would not be able to have a funeral Mass for my mother, who passed away in March. A private viewing at the funeral home and then the Rite of Committal service at the cemetery was all that was allowed. It was painful for everyone close to my Mom, including our pastor, who was truly hoping to celebrate the funeral Mass for her as he did for my father, who passed away 10 years ago. As hard as it is to say goodbye to our loved ones, the beautiful way our Catholic Church recognizes the dignity of the human person from conception until natural death is seen in all of its glory in the funeral liturgy, as explained by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Conference.

“At the funeral liturgy, the Church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God’s tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. The funeral liturgy, therefore, is an act of worship, and not merely an expression of grief.”

As trying as this season has been, it certainly has made many Catholics, myself included, appreciate our faith even more. The hunger for God is growing stronger with every day and week that we are not able to experience the sacraments. More Catholics are seeking out the Masses being livestreamed

regularly. And at my own parish, for example, a number of parishioners longing to be close to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament were seen on several occasions, actually kneeling on the hard cold ground outside the church with their hands on the doors reaching out for Jesus. I'm also quite certain that the Mass we hope to have for my mom, God willing in the near future, will be even more meaningful.

So while this certainly was the Lentiest Lent ever, it could also turn out being one of the most profound Lenten seasons as well.

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