

# As restrictions ease, focus on the mission God has planned for you

The morning that I wrote this, the Franciscan Friars just finished finding food for 40 families. They lined up on the sidewalk, 6-feet apart from each other, on a gritty inner-city street in New York City. Even with the masks, you could tell they left with a smile. For those smiles, we exchanged words of comfort, prayer, bread and vegetables picked up from a local supermarket (thanks be to God the supermarkets still have something to give). It was worth it. During these days living in the epicenter of a worldwide crisis, we have come to appreciate even a hidden smile amidst these days of uncertainty.



Photo courtesy of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

Beyond the smiles on a Monday morning, we have been experiencing new difficulties and challenges in our work with

the poor. The poor in [the New York City area](#) have been among the hardest hit during this COVID-19 crisis. Not being able to be there for our people when a close relative passes has been particularly difficult for us friars. It has become more and more common for me to hear the pain on the telephone of families not able to be present during the last moments of a loved one's life or the frustration in their voice at not being able to navigate the labyrinthine process of burying the deceased. Still, we find a way to help, for the love of Christ impels us.

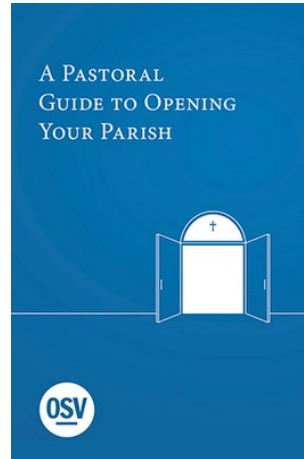
## **A blessing for many**

The love of Christ is still with us during these difficult times. With respect, his love is not limited to the walls of church buildings nor weekly Mass attendance. We need the sacraments, and they have returned in some dioceses and will return soon in others, but what has God been trying to do in us during this time? His love in us grows when we relinquish our grip on our own lives and turn more to him. Oh Lord, have mercy on us, that it has taken this for us to long for the Eucharist, to closely evaluate our relationship with you, to pray with family and friends like never before. Lord, I say again, have mercy.

[Read more from our special section 'Moving Forward in Faith' here](#)

Perhaps you would agree with me that it would have been preferable to come to this deepening of relationship and longing for God under different circumstances. Nevertheless, now that we find ourselves here, let us ask, "What shall we do now?" With the world beginning to emerge from this quarantine, we should ponder a few questions and intentionally apply ourselves to not be the same after this crisis. Let us look particularly [at our family life](#), our faith and our own interior life.

## Booklet



This article is included in “A Pastoral Guide to Opening Your Parish,” a new booklet from OSV. As our parishes begin to reopen following local guidelines, the Catholic faithful have many questions and legitimate concerns about what life will look like post-pandemic, and we hope this booklet helps give parish leaders a playbook to welcome back parishioners following the shutdown. For more information, or to order, [click here](#).

Aside from the above difficult situations, I must say that the positive effect of this epidemic is much more palpable. Our lives so filled with the spirit of a “Martha” have been stunningly invited to deepen our prayer now as a “Mary” (cf. Lk 10:38-42)). In addition to a newfound deep appreciation for teachers and grocery store workers, we have all grown in different ways. Parents have found multitasking skills they were heretofore unaware of. The inner chef within us all has begun to emerge. Countless wives are still stunned that their unconscious prayer to be together as a family with nowhere to go has been granted. There have been both families who have struggled with each other and those who have rediscovered their families.

With the veil of hyperactivity removed overnight, we have seen the limits of our interpersonal skills. I would venture that the length and duration of this quarantine has helped most of

the families I have spoken to even grow fond of this unique time that “we will never have again.” Granted, these gains have been hard-fought. What are some ways we can keep this connection going in our family after things open up again? I recommend a conversation in families where everyone gets to share their greatest challenge during this time, their greatest blessing and what they hope will not change. Parents then should consider the data and establish concrete measures to keep the good going.

## **Longing for worship**

One common theme that has been repeated by many lips is, “When will we be able to go back to holy Mass?” As we all are aware, the entire world has taken unprecedented measures to combat this novel coronavirus. In so doing, the value of human life has been the unspoken principle operative in many decisions.

Many dioceses [have already resumed public Masses](#), with proper precautions. [Others will do so soon](#). It has been suggested that church buildings operate at around 25% of normal capacity. We would be looking at different Mass schedules, Masses offered during the week and the ongoing dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. The faithful can be of great aid by informing themselves of all the information, being heroically patient while waiting to enter their parish and helping others by disinfecting their own space once the Mass is finished. For those who are still waiting for a return to the public celebration of the Mass, I recommend [forming a part of your house that is dedicated to prayer](#) – set up your prayer altar and leave it up no matter how inconvenient. Let this area become the prayer section of your home, and commit yourself and your loved ones to prayer there even after the stay-at-home orders are lifted. Be bold in inviting friends and neighbors to pray with you. You never know, they might be waiting for your invitation.



Photo courtesy of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

## Thinking inward, reaching outward

Now we come to the essential question: What of our own interior life? Whatever your situation, do not let this time pass without a deep examination of your own relationship with God. In a healthy way, [ponder your own death](#). Ask yourself if you knew you had only so much time left, what would you do? Then begin doing that right away. Do not get caught up only in external actions or reconciliation with estranged family members – as good as these may be. Pray that the Holy Spirit deepens your prayer and gives you wisdom to live a life of deeper connection with the living God.

The food handout was nearing its end, and the gratitude of the people was palpable. We took a few pictures in full COVID-19 gear. I said, “These pictures will remind us this time next year of what we lived through.” The people’s response was simply, “May God grant us the grace to be here next year.” It reminded me of a Jewish prayer at the end of the seder meal: “Next year in Jerusalem!”

Then my mind remembered how the Hebrews celebrated their time in the desert through the Feast of Booths. They would set up a tent and eat their meals there. I’ve got it! Next year, around

Holy Week, let's live as we did when we were in quarantine! It would be a time to remember the dead and remember the time when the whole world became a hermitage; a time to pray as a family and to renew the practices that brought us closer together in 2020. Whatever we do, let us not miss this opportunity to bring Jesus more to a world that so desperately needs him; for the love of Christ impels us.

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