

## IT USED TO BE . . .

It used to be that we gathered as a parish family each Sunday to pray with each other, to sing, to hug each other at the sign of peace, to feast on the Eucharist, and linger after Mass to catch up with each other. It used to be that our children danced down the center aisle on the way to children's liturgy and came back later with big smiles on their faces showing off what they had made. It used to be that there were classes for those entering the church and children being baptized and preparing for First Communion and Confirmation. It used to be children came for tutoring on Wednesday afternoons and Guatemalan bands practiced in the evenings. It used to be there was Mass on Thursdays and Saturdays followed by prayer. It used to be that children were in school, people went to work, got paid, congregated at each others' homes, went to restaurants, concerts, and sporting events.

It used to be...

Now we still gather as a family each Sunday, but we're in our own homes and Mass is live-streamed. We can still sing and pray, but there's a overwhelming hunger for Eucharist that nothing else can satisfy. We aren't able to see our beautiful children and hear the music of their laughter. We can't hug each other. We find ways to stay connected, but it's not the same. While there's a new awareness of what is most important, a growing stream of kindness and governments working together, there's also the isolation of social distancing, the daily news conferences reporting new cases and deaths, growing fear and loneliness, the ever-present cloud of pandemic hanging over us, and worry that this new normal that we're living may go on forever and we'll never recapture what used to be. Being physically cut off from each other makes it so much harder.

By faith we know and believe that God is with us, that coronavirus will not have the last word, that there will be resurrection and new life ahead, but it feels like no people have experienced anything like this before. Certainly in my 78 years of life I have not.

We're in a place of lament, something our forebears in faith knew very well. In fact many of the psalms and a complete book of the Bible reflect on this very experience. See if you can find any similarities to what you might be feeling in this small sample of readings.



### Psalm 13

How long, LORD? Will you utterly forget me?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I carry sorrow in my soul,  
grief in my heart day after day?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?  
But I trust in your mercy.  
Grant my heart joy in your salvation,  
I will sing to the LORD,  
for he has dealt bountifully with me!

### Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon  
there we sat weeping  
when we remembered Zion.  
On the poplars in its midst  
we hung up our harps.  
For there our captors asked us  
for the words of a song;  
Our tormentors, for joy:  
"Sing for us a song of Zion!"  
But how could we sing a song of the LORD  
in a foreign land?

### Book of Lamentations

How solitary sits the city,  
once filled with people.  
She who was great among the nations  
is now like a widow.  
Once a princess among the provinces,  
now a toiling slave.  
The roads to Zion mourn,  
empty of pilgrims to her feasts.  
All her gateways are desolate,  
her priests groan,  
Her young women grieve;  
her lot is bitter.  
Jerusalem remembers  
in days of wretched homelessness,  
All the precious things she once had  
in days gone by. (Chapter 1:1, 4, 7, 16)

How far from me is anyone to comfort,  
anyone to restore my life.  
Remembering it over and over,  
my soul is downcast,  
But this I will call to mind;  
therefore I will hope:  
The LORD's acts of mercy are not exhausted,  
his compassion is not spent;  
They are renewed each morning—  
great is your faithfulness!  
*The LORD is my portion, I tell myself,  
therefore I will hope in him. Chapter 3: 20-24)*

It's uncharted territory for us, but we're in this together and Jesus is with us. The waves may be rocking the boat, but Jesus is not asleep. We are safe. We will get through this though daily life may be different. And some day—though it's hard to imagine now—we may be looking back at this time with gratitude as a period of great grace.