

**July 24, 2021**  
**Novena Reflection by Father Rob Carbonneau, C.P., Ph.D.**  
**Novena Theme: Lift High the Cross**

*First Reading: James 5: 8-11*

You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed, we call blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of the perseverance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, because “the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”

*Gospel: Luke 5: 17-20*

One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set [him] in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, “As for you, your sins are forgiven.”

**Theme of the Day: “The Compassion and the Cross”**

The Spanish Influenza of 1918 hit St. Ann’s Monastery in Scranton, Pennsylvania with intensity. The Passionist archives explains that on October 6 “public authorities [both] state & local issued orders...to control and prevent the spread of influenza which has become a plague over the country. These orders forbade the assembly of the people in any place including churches.” Police and the churches notified the people “the flu was blamed.”

However, the epidemic persisted. As October continued, The Bishop of Scranton agreed with the public authorities that Masses were not to be celebrated in churches on October 17. All Passionists were isolated at the monastery.

According to the entry of October 11, 1918. “Thank God St. Ann’s Parish fared pretty well” through the quarantine. Among those infected only two or three parishioners died. Passionists in the monastery were also fortunate. Eighteen did get the flu. Sadly, one seminarian did die during the second wave of the flu. On November 10, 1918, St. Ann’s Parish started public mass again.

Recall how shocked we were in March 2020 when the decision was made to close businesses and churches.

We heard some people ask:

Has this ever been done before? The answer is Yes.

Is this an overreaction? Perhaps. We still do not know.

The Passionists and Catholics at St. Ann's Monastery, Scranton lived in fear and with unknowns in 1918.

Since March 2020 we have lived with fears and unknowns.

Today, let us reflect on our experience of "pandemic faith." None of us have been immune from the trials and tribulations of the pandemic.

We are numb.

We are exhausted.

Over the entire year we have heard the phrase "say their names."

So right now: "say their names."

To yourself: "say the the names of those you know whose lives has suffered because of the Covid-19 virus.

Now turn to the person next to you: say that same name out loud.

The name I want to say out loud is Passionist Father Bill Maguire.

He lived and ministered here in Scranton about 15 years ago.

Today, Father Bill Maguire is a hospital chaplain at Yale Medical Center in New Haven, Connecticut.

Father Bill Maguire came down with covid-19.

His brother came down with covid-19 and was hospitalized at St. Mary's Hospital in Waterbury, Connecticut.

The brother of Father Bill could have no visitors.

The brother of Father Bill died alone.

When we take the opportunities to say the name out loud of those who have suffered from the Covid-19 virus we show our respect for them.

We also name our own faith.

Let us say their names.

Let us seek to understand the meaning of "compassion and the cross."

To "lift high the cross" in our life it is crucial to know and understand the fragmented splinters and blunt planks of wood that we have had to carry in life.

I lived in San Francisco from 2012 to 2018.

I assisted at Sacred Heart Cathedral Prep High School. Few people had ever heard of the Passionists.

At one mass for high school parents I explained how St. Paul of the Cross founded the Passionists in 1720.

He founded the Passionists so that people might name their sufferings and have faith to carry their cross in life.

With this awareness and first step they can find themselves on the long march,  
their sacred journey,  
their daily road to personal healing and peace.

A parent asked to talk with me.

We decided to meet at Union Square in the center San Francisco.

She told me her son had died from suicide by jumping off a bridge.

She said his name was Devin.

After more than an hour she said had emptied herself of sorrow.

She asked: will my grief ever end?

I really didn't know what to answer.

At that moment I thought of Passionist Father John O'Brien.

He was obese. Throughout life he carried his own cross.

One of his favorite sayings: "Jesus was on his Cross. He died. After three days he was resurrected."

Then I made this statement to her: "Jesus was on the Cross.

How long do you want to be on your cross?

Seek the resurrection."

At that moment, God's grace provided her with the strength to get off her cross and rise to a new life.

She was coming to peace with the suicide of her son.

Now she has a better understanding of the "compassion and the cross."

Of course, this is a long journey.

Of course, we have care for our own personal, mental, and physical health.

At the same time what cross do we carry in life?

Let us have the courage to express our faith in God, seek his grace and strength.

We can arise from our personal cross.

We want to experience the resurrection in our own life.

We just heard the story of the paralytic man.  
Did you ever notice we can't say the name of any person in this dramatic story?

Unknown is the name of who was lowered through the roof.  
Unknown are the names of those who held the ropes.  
Everyone is undocumented in this narrative.  
All the essential characters are unnamed?  
Say their name! We can't!

How typical of Luke and so many of the Gospel miracle stories.  
No one is asked for an ID.  
More important is the faith and humanity of the people who wish to be healed.

Compare that to the life we lead in 2021.  
We are asked:  
Show me your  
social security ID,  
driver's license,  
passport,  
work ID,  
vaccination ID,  
prescription card,  
library card,  
credit card,  
school ID.

So, we tear open our wallet. Everything flies on to the floor and frustrates those in line behind us. We show our smart phone. At that very moment we realize we are not smart enough to use it.

I got so frustrated once, I said: "Wait I have a fake ID, does that work?"  
The security person answered: Sure, that's fine. I just need to see any ID that all."

Of course. I am exaggerating, yet only to a point.

Allow me to make the following important observation  
Let us be humble enough to substitute our own names and others into these familiar Scripture stories.

You and I are with the paralyzed man.  
You and I are the person in sin.  
You and I are the local demonic on the side of the road.  
You and I are about ready to cast the first stone.  
You and I are the people who are amazed at the teachings of Jesus.  
You and I want to betray Jesus.  
You and I are the good Samaritan.  
You and I are like Saul.

Are you and I ready for the moment to hear the voice of God that will change our life?

Is it happening right now at this solemn novena?

***Is this why you looked at the basilica, decided to visit the basilica, light a candle at the basilica, say a prayer at the basilica,***

Is this why you receive the sacrament of reconciliation through confession?  
Is this why you receive the Eucharist at Mass?  
Is this why you turned on the Diocese of Scranton TV station?  
Is this why you are watching right now on Facebook or YouTube?  
Now is the moment of conversion.

The Compassion of the Cross comes to life in 2021 when we hear and understand that these stories are happening now in Scranton, throughout Northeast Pennsylvania, America, in multiple languages throughout the world. This is when we fully understand the healing power of Holy Scripture and “compassion of the cross.”

The story of the paralytic man is an example of creative strong faith. These men are like are like spiritual first responders. They adapted to the situation.

We have seen our own creative faith throughout this pandemic. Did we ever think that we would receive the Eucharist at the end of the liturgy? Did we ever think we would have school online?

We have worked from home.

In one case a person was able to relocate and work. This led the parents of the person to erroneously believe that translated into her having now job.

This reality has led to renegotiation of marriages.

This reality has led to renegotiation and time with our pets.

Pandemic faith has allowed us to participate in funerals and celebrations.

At the same time by being cautious we have been hopeful.

To keep their parents and grandparents safe one young man and his girlfriend decided the best decision was not to see each other in person. And they only live in the same neighborhood. They wondered? Will they still like each other when they resume dating?

What personal decision

of work,

school,

family

and love have we made so that we have been able to have compassion of the cross during this pandemic?

I have had a Sunday Zoon mass for my immediate family.

Others have joined from across the country.

We pray for one another, mourn for one another, gain wisdom from one another.

We have formed a community of faith online.

Some Zoom participants have wondered if they will they miss this new sense of community when they attend their regular parish masses once again in person?

Pandemic faith has exposed the how the poor carry their cross of technology.

No money might mean no computer.

How strong is each one of us to lift high the cross of technology that we carry each day? Pandemic faith has exposed the gifts and inequality of humanity.

Yes, “We have had the patience of Job throughout this pandemic.”

We all know Job.

God puts him to the test precisely because it is a sign of faith.

This might have been how we have been living our life even before this pandemic hit.

In the Book of Job, a pandemic is only one of many events.

Compassion of the cross is possible when all of us in Scranton, Northeast Pennsylvania and the world open our eyes and recognize our common crosses.

Let us help each other name our cross. Let us help each other carry our cross. Scripture tells us “our cross is easy and our burden light”

Let me conclude by suggesting some three strategies of life that might help all understand the gift of compassion of the cross.

First gift:

The city of Scranton resides in a valley.

How common is it for us to wake up in the morning and see low hanging fog?

An insight hit me:

Think of FOG is an acronym, and abbreviation for “faith of God.”

Let us see fog as a sign from God that we will be able to carry our personal cross of life through any weather and any circumstances.

Good weather will come.

It will be a clear and confident sign that God is always us.

Second gift:

Someone in San Francisco told me that when she was in college, she came to the awareness that she had a reading comprehension issue.

On her own she got tested.

She learned she has dyslexia.

She adjusted her reading skills.

One day I saw an advertisement for the Hospice of the Sacred Heart in Dunmore, Pennsylvania. When stopped at a red light I had the time to see the sign in a different way.

I inverted the “C.”

Instead of SACRED I read it as SCARED.

Many of us go through life with physical, cognitive or emotional disabilities?

We might ask ourselves such an awareness has given us the creative resolve to develop and accentuate other abilities in life that enable us lift high your cross in life?

Understanding compassion for ourselves and others is a lifetime journey.

There is another perspective to sacred and scared.

How many times do the Gospel stories tell us the disciples were in fear?

Mary receives the message from the angel Gabriel. The angel replies “Do not be afraid Mary.”

The very moment she is scared is also the most sacred moment.

Sacred – Scared.

Let us have faith that the presence of God is always with us.

We have survived with creative pandemic faith.

The third gift.

How great it is to meet a holy person.

I suggest that this Solemn novena is an opportunity to remind ourselves are that we are that holy person

HOLY.

What does this stand for?

Help Others Love Ourselves.

If we wish to walk the journey of life with other let us nurture self-respect.

This is how we have the compassion of life to high the cross

We are the

HOLY people of Scranton,

the HOLY people of Northeast Pennsylvania

and the HOLY people of the world.

We possess a faith on fire

Let us have compassion of the cross so that we do not burn out.

Good St. Ann pray for us.