



Archbishop of Montreal

Homily
Sunday, March 22, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Laetare - Year A (Jn 9:1-41)

Lord, come to knock on the door of our hearts!

Is God essential to us?

It sometimes happens to us that we are faced with challenges as individuals. However, during this past week, we have all been hard hit by the same challenge, a pandemic with many repercussions. One of these alarming repercussions is that gatherings in churches, just as all other public gatherings, have been cancelled. The churches themselves, the doors of our churches are now closed for an indeterminate period of time. However, keeping our houses of prayer open is something essential.

During this pandemic, even what we would have considered to be essential is affected! Most of the time, even when we have to let go of the superfluous, the essentials are not affected. But in these times that seem so strange to us, even what is essential is affected.

Yet, in a manner of speaking, that what is the most essential of all the essentials remains always present! For each and every one of us! For God, you are essential. Now we could turn around the question and ask, is God really essential for us?

In our eyes, is God so essential that he is first of all the essentials? I have to repeat this: For God, you are essential, you come first. Many things are essential, of course, many things are important in life, but for God, human beings are the first of all the essentials. This brings back the question: Is God the first essential in our life?

In today's Gospel, we see a person born blind who is cured by Jesus. Several times in the Gospels, it happens that someone meets Jesus and asks: "Lord, can you heal me?" The Lord answers: "Do you believe?" To which he replies: "Yes, I believe." "Be healed," concludes Jesus, who thus brings about the desired healing.

But in today's passage, we see a different approach. It is not that the man born blind asks Jesus to heal him. The man doesn't really know Jesus. It is Jesus who approaches the man. It is Jesus who starts the conversation. It is Jesus who touches him and tells him: "Go, wash in the pool." In leaving, all that the man born blind knows is that Jesus cured him. At some point in the future, the man will learn that it was Jesus, God Himself who healed him.

God wants to be close to us.

As we pass through these uncertain times, we have the option to pray. We are called to prayer, we are invited to turn to God. But we are just as much invited to pray for those who do not believe in God, for those who are perhaps not yet at the point of praying to God themselves.

In his love, God wants to be close to the heart of everyone. He wants to answer the needs and be in the hearts of all who believe in him. But he also wants to answer the needs of those who have

perhaps forgotten him in their life. Jesus has come into the world to save all humanity. God loves all humanity. God wants to be close to every human being. During this pandemic, we discover or rediscover that we are all brothers and sisters as human beings, even when we have different faiths. This is indeed the right time for us to come to see the essential in all the essentials, the opportunity to think of the love of God for both those who are far from him and for those who remained close.

While we pray, we are certainly invited to pray for ourselves without forgetting to pray for each other, to pray for all persons, and to pray for all of humanity. When we go into the depth of our heart, now when all of humanity is plunged into uncertainty, we ask ourselves, will the whole world become sick?

It is clear to us that the whole world will not get sick, but even just one person, one victim, is already one too many. It is already one victim whom we must draw close to us, for whom we must pray, and for whom it is demanded of us to show compassion.

Uncertainty, solitude: God comes knocking at the door of our hearts!

Lately, we feel a lot of uncertainty while we also experience a lot of solitude. We live in a time of isolation when we have to observe physical distancing, which can make people feel alone and isolated from the rest of the world. Many are alone at home. We must think of them as victims by collateral damage caused by this pandemic. Let us be ready to hold their hand, figuratively speaking, or lend an ear, to call them, make a phone call, as signs of life to establish a real connection.

Today, we also go through economic uncertainty. But whether it is about health or solitude or economic uncertainty, or even if we are not directly touched by the pandemic, let us take time to recognize that we are all visited by God who knocks on the door of our heart. We cannot open the doors of our churches, but we can open the door of our heart. We can open our heart because God is personally knocking to get in there. And when we open our heart to God, this is perhaps something very precious that can come from this predicament: The opportunity to learn how to open our heart to God. In the end, even when church doors will be open again or even if they had remained open all along, all of us must eventually learn how to open the door of our heart.

Ultimately, do we desire to open the door of our heart to God?

Do we really desire to open our heart to God? Above all, God really wants to be there. He wants to be close to every one of you, to every one of us.

Let us take the time for silence. If we are silent before God, if we find our focus, if we listen quietly to the Word of God, this time of prayer gives us the new strength that we need. Each day of the week, open your Bible, because God wants to come to us not only on Sundays but every day of the week.

Take the Bible in your hands, read it for a few moments every day, one minute, two minutes, five minutes, fifteen minutes, it does not matter! Read the Bible slowly and you will see the results. In the morning, open your Bible, read the Bible, integrate some time for it into your schedule. Take the time to read the Bible in order to discover how a sole Word of God has the power to nourish and accompany you throughout your day.

It is your daily bread. The daily bread is the bread that we eat, but the daily bread is also the Word of God that nourishes our heart, our soul, and our spirit.

We pass through this special time that helps us to return to what is the essential of the essential, that which gives us the joy of experiencing the presence of God who knocks on the door of our heart. The essential of the essential, this is also the possibility of strengthening solidarity between us, so that each victim who is afflicted by this disease may discover com-*passion* and a helping hand. Let us help ensure that each individual who is suffering financially can benefit from the

financial aid that government institutions are putting in place, so that all can overcome equally the economic uncertainty linked to the pandemic in which we find ourselves.

Let us take a moment of silence to stand before God and say with all sincerity: “Lord, Lord, come knock on the door of my heart.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal