

Spiritually Speaking

Misery – Mercy and Mystery

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph SDB, Pastor, St. Patrick Church, Heppner

The universal church celebrated the second Sunday of Easter as the “Feast of Divine Mercy.” This particular feast reminds us about divine love, care, and concern for each one of us. The Gospel reading of the day reminded us of the quarantine the disciples experienced during the first Easter morning.

In the Gospel of John 20:19 we read: “It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind the locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities.” The risen Lord sees the misery and fright of the disciples and understands the incarceration of the apostles and enters into their lock-down experience.

Presently, the whole world has been experiencing quarantine for over a month due to the rampant spread of the invincible COVID-19. The threat of COVID-19 has shut down our economy, our freedom of movement and coming together - everything is in a stand-still condition.

Many of us are behind closed doors because of the virus but are also going through emotional misery because of our shame, guilt of the past, brokenness, disappointments, failing to reach ambitious goals. We need to look into ourselves, into how we can find ways and means of overcoming unhealthy feelings of depression, anxiety, hurt, loss of self-worth and hatred. In these miserable conditions He comes with His Mercy.

The present pandemic reminds us that there are no differences or borders among those who suffer. The virus shows no discrimination. This particular epidemic has profoundly shaken us all by what is happening all around us. The time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family. The second week of Easter’s second reading brought us an understanding of the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles. It received mercy and lived with mercy, “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2:44-45) I am watching these days how people are reaching out to the needy in various ways. The Lord needs you and me to express his love and compassion to the world.

I hail from India and I am also watching how my own friends and colleagues there are reaching out to the poor and the marginalized in their own locality and going out in public risking their lives, empowering, consoling and strengthening the weak and the lonely. In the present situation, the Lord is inviting each one of us, to stretch our helping hand and reach out to someone who is in need of service.

Saint Faustina, after meeting Jesus, wrote, “In a soul that is suffering we should see Jesus on the cross, not a parasite and a burden... [Lord] you give us the chance to practice deeds of mercy, and we practice making judgements.” (Diary, 6 September 1937) Yet she herself complained one day to Jesus that in being merciful, one is thought to be naive. She said, “Lord, they often abuse my goodness.” And Jesus replied, “Never mind, don’t let it bother you, just be merciful to everyone always.” (24 December 1937) To everyone: let us not think only of our interests. Let us welcome this time of trial as an opportunity to prepare for our collective future.

This particular period of shut down is actually in the plan of God. In Genesis 7:16 we read: “A male and female of each kind of living being went into the boat with Noah, as God had commanded. Then the Lord shut the door behind Noah.” This present period is for our transformation and purification. He wants us to be a new creation with him after this period of shutdown. God has a clear plan for all his doings. This lockdown we are experiencing I don’t think is merely by chance.

God plans everything well in advance - which is very clear from the multiplication of the loaves. He was sure of what he was going to do. He tests Philip in these words, “Where can we buy enough food to feed these people?” (John 6:5) He planned it and he had a solution to it. The Lord is not like us; we look for solutions when we face a problem, whereas God is the creator and he has a solution to a problem.

The Lord invites each one of us to face the misery that we are experiencing right now with hope and courage, for there is a solution. The Lord is always faithful to his promise, “I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” Mathew 28:20 In these miserable situations of ours the Lord always comes in and supports us with his peace, mercy, compassion and tranquility. He does it through various ways. Those of us who experience this mercy of the Lord, by reaching out to others with mercy and compassion, take part in the mystery of Christ.

District increases meals served to students



Above: Children meet the bus to get their meals. Right: District staff prepares meals for area children.



Like all school districts in Oregon, Morrow County School District is grappling with many issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent statewide school closure. District staff are navigating information from state agencies, creating a distance learning program, helping families with internet access and getting teachers connected with students, among countless other tasks and priorities.

They are also feeding students – a lot of them. According to Marie Shimer, Director of Educational

Services, during the first week of the closure back in March, the district was serving 300 students a day. During the week of April 13th, each day they averaged just under 1,500 students a day. In the first five weeks, they have served over 21,000 meals to students.

Morrow County School District has schools in three different communities, Boardman, Heppner and Irrigon. Meals are served in all three, at Sam Boardman Elementary, Heppner Jr/Sr High and A.C. Houghton Elementary. At those school kitchens, meals are

served on a grab-and-go basis where students pick up breakfast, lunch and a snack each day. On Fridays, students get meals for three days. Meals are also handed out along bus routes in all three communities, so families can meet the bus along the route if it’s not convenient for them to travel to the school buildings.

So, who is preparing the food and handing it out? In addition to regular food service staff, the district has tapped all types of district employees to help with meal production and delivery, custodians, clas-

sified employees, district staff, teachers and coaches. Community partners like Head Start, CARE, Mid-Columbia Bus Company and Migrant Education Program staff from InterMountain Education Service District are also helping.

“During this uncertain and trying time for so many of our families, meals are essential. Yes, it’s mandated by the state of Oregon that districts do this, but even this small connection to their schools and telling them they are missed is helpful for kids,” said Shimer.

BEO reports first quarter earnings

BEO Bancorp and its subsidiary, Bank of Eastern Oregon, announced 1st quarter 2020 consolidated net income of \$1,110,000 or \$0.94 per share, compared to \$1,094,000 or \$0.92 per share for first quarter 2019. Total assets were \$485.4 million, up 3.65 percent year over year. Net loans of \$423.6 million were up 24.5 percent from the same period in 2019, while deposits were at \$432.7 million up 2.66 percent year over year.

“The positive results for 1Q2020 are overshadowed by the current events asso-

ciated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The illnesses and loss of life across our nation and the world cause us all to realign our priorities and the things that we hold dear. We are fortunate to live where we do... a place where people look out for each other; a place where businesses band together to do the right thing by supporting one another. While none of us know when the travel restrictions and the stay home orders will end, we do know that each day brings us closer to whatever the ‘new normal’ will be,”

said President and CEO Jeff Bailey.

Chief Financial Officer Mark Lemmon said, “Shareholder equity is up 6.8 percent over the past year; Return on Average Assets and Return on Average Equity 0.91 percent and 11.72 percent respectively.” Lemmon added, “The Federal Reserve has dropped interest rates considerably over the course of the quarter to try and offset the negative impact on the economy brought on by the pandemic, but the bottom line is that the jobless num-

bers will dictate how long the economic slowdown lasts.”

Chief Operations Officer Gary Prophet said, “Loan growth has come from across our system, but more so from Pasco, Hermiston, Pendleton and La Grande. Deposits are relatively flat in comparison.”

“As part of the government’s economic stimulus package, the Small Business Administration has provided loan programs with very favorable terms. By partnering with SBA, we were able to help a significant number of customers across our footprint. It is another example of doing what our bank has done for over 75 years. We continue to work with our neighbors and friends during these trying times. I truly appreciate the dedication of our customers and the hard work of our employees, as we move forward towards brighter times,” concluded Bailey.

Chamber Chatter

Area residents are reminded to complete their 2020 Census information. This information is kept confidential but makes a difference in the funding that Morrow County receives to help the county, communities and individuals. You can do it online at www.2020census.gov and it only takes about five minutes.

Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Community and Public Enhancement Grant applications are still being accepted through Friday, April 24. For a form, contact the Heppner Chamber or go to the website www.heppnerchamber.com and click on the “Economic Development” tab to print off a form.

Until further notice the

Morrow County Transfer Stations will be open for free dumping on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (or until full) and closed on Sunday. Take advantage of this great opportunity to clean up around your house, yard and dispose of it free. For additional information, please contact

Morrow County Public Works, Monday-Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 541-989-9500.

The US Chamber Foundation Grant Save Small Business Fund is a \$5,000 one-time supplemental cash grant. To learn more and to apply for a grant, visit savesmallbusiness.com.

Joel Peterson
MORROW COUNTY COMMISSIONER 1
Experience & Integrity

FREE DUMPING
Until further notice to aid in the protection of our residents the north and south transfer stations will only be open on Saturday's 9am - 4pm.
It is recommended that everyone follow precautionary guidelines to help prevent the spread of illnesses.
- If you feel sick, stay home.
- Practice social distancing by maintaining 6 feet or more between you and someone else.
- Wash your hands with soap or hand sanitizer.
MORROW COUNTY TRANSFER STATIONS
NORTH TRANSFER: 69900 Frontage Ln., Boardman, Oregon 97818
SOUTH TRANSFER: 57185 Highway 74, Lexington, Oregon 97839
Questions or comments contact: Morrow County Public Works, 365 West Highway 74, Lexington, Oregon 97839 Phone: 541-989-9500 Monday - Thursday 8am - 5pm
OR UNTIL FULL!

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE: MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.