

From the Chaplaincy



VIRAL LOADING

By Fr. Francis Ongkingco

Viral load refers to the amount of virus in an infected person's blood. Experts would technically describe this as the number of viral particles in each millimeter of blood: thus, a higher load would imply greater risk of getting sick or being capable of infecting others.

With so much of COVID still misunderstood, people and establishments are taking more and

more serious measures in order to physically stem the pandemic: social distancing, the wearing of face masks and shields, reminders to sanitize one's hands with alcohol and avoiding social and religious gatherings.

People, through such health measures, may indeed be lessening their chances of catching an *invisible* threat to their health. They are,

however, catching less and less of another invisible reality without which may weaken their spiritual well-being: the sacramental graces of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Recently, Cardinal Robert Sarah, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship stressed that it is 'necessary and urgent' for the faithful to return, following closely the guidelines of health officials, to the normal mode of attending the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The Cardinal clarified that although the streamed masses and other celebrations were helpful, "No broadcast is equivalent to personal participation, nor can it substitute for that participation."

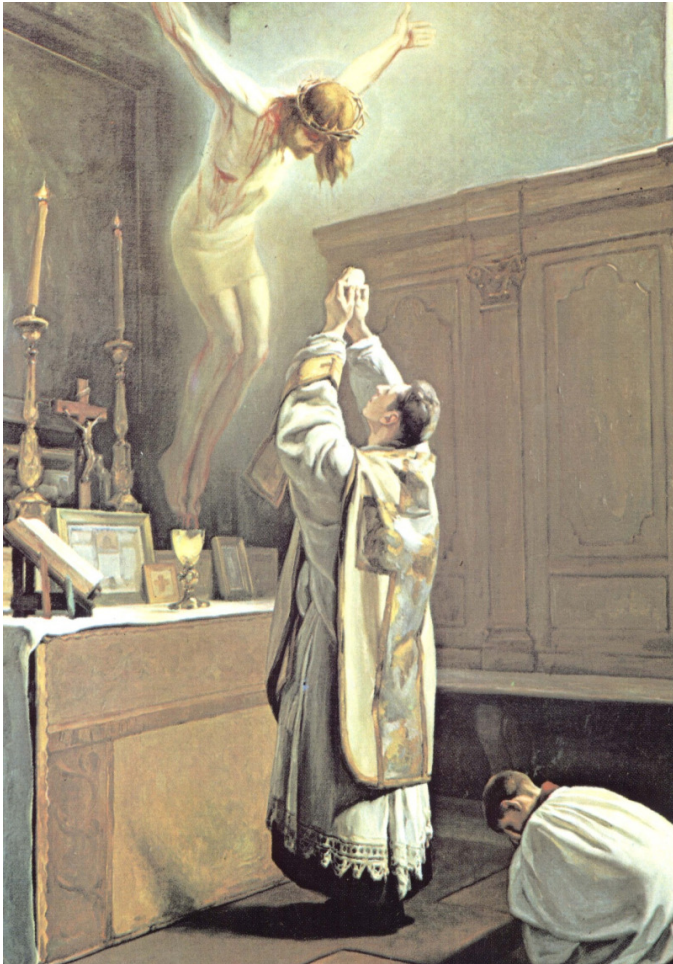


An Italian priest taped photos of his parishioners onto empty pews during the lockdown. Photo taken from www.ncronline.org

Moreover, he explains, "these transmissions ... risk moving us away from a personal and intimate encounter with the Incarnate God who gave himself to us not in a virtual way, but in a real way." (Letter, *Let us return to the Eucharist with joy!* Sept. 3, 2020)"

The Cardinal reflects how the lockdowns have somehow helped to appreciate better the Sacrament: "Aware that God never abandons the humanity He has created, and that even the hardest trials can bear fruits of grace, we have accepted our distance from the Lord's altar as a time of Eucharistic fasting, useful for us to rediscover its vital importance, beauty and immeasurable preciousness."

Thus, as soon as circumstances may allow, he urged the faithful to return to the Sacraments. "We must return to the Eucharist with a purified heart, with a renewed amazement, with an increased desire to meet the Lord, to be with Him, to receive Him and to bring Him to our brothers and sisters with the witness of a life full of faith, love and hope." We "cannot be without the Christian community," he added, "cannot be without the house of the Lord," and "cannot be without the Lord's Day. (Ibid.)"



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Cardinal Robert Sarah

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May his words help us to fight back the virus of routine and indifference towards the transforming graces that can only be gifted us in the sacraments. Even though in some circumstances it may not be possible to attend the Eucharistic celebration or to go to confession, may we at least strive to intensify our participation in the Mass and seek constant works of penance within our homes.

For example, although there is nothing wrong with watching masses in different parts of the world that the Internet may *leisurely* provide, let us *anchor our participation* to one familiar physical venue and at a set time during the week or day. This will already help to give the mass an important place during the day. It will also be like physically setting ourselves to go there with our family and relatives.

Let's not just *watch the celebration*, may we be already engaged beforehand: familiarizing ourselves with the readings and responses, already spiritually huddled with the family's prayer intentions and after the Mass – even if we may not have received our Lord physically – to spend a few minutes thanking our Lord for both visible and invisible graces received.

If we make a daily effort not to fall into mediocrity, our Lord will surely reward our intense desires with the fruitful graces of conversion. Let us pray that parishes and churches will soon open and together we may all joyfully proclaim, “I rejoiced when they said let us go to the house of the Lord! (Ps. 122)”