

I'm grateful for your prayerful presence this evening, as we gather in vigil ahead of tomorrow's ordination Mass. I'm pretty happy right now. I am certain that the adventure upon which I will embark tomorrow is not possible, nor even desirable, on my own. So, thank you for your kindness and reminding me of that by your presence here tonight.

In 2004, Pope St. John Paul II published a memoir of his time as bishop and his election into the papacy, a work entitled, "Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way." This work had a primary audience of his fellow bishops, though, of course many others read it. Its title are the words of Jesus himself who in the Garden of Gethsemane is confronted by his betrayers. The Gospel writer records the scene in this way. The Gospel according to Matthew:

*Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer saying, "My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he returned to his disciples, he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

*Withdrawing a second time he prayed again, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking your will be done." Then he returned once more and found them asleep for they could not keep their eyes open. He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again. Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Rise, let us be on our way. Look, my betrayer is at hand."*

The disciples already are aware of the growing menace around their Lord. Forces of opposition and threat are closing in from all sides. The weight of it all has left them exhausted and depleted. Even while Jesus is communing with his Father in prayer, the disciples cannot remain awake with him. He asked them to stand vigil, "Sit here while I go over there and pray," but they cannot watch with him for even one hour. Their human strength fails them. They are unable to remain in vigil with Jesus.

Then when the betrayer is finally at hand Jesus says, "Rise, let us be on our way." For the hour is at hand and the hour of our salvation. And despite their fear, their exhaustion, their confusion he says, "Rise, let us be on our way." Mind you he does not say, "Rise, I must be on my way," or "Rise, be on your way." Instead, he says, "Rise, let us be on our way." In this call Jesus confirms his earlier command, "Take my yoke upon your shoulders for I am meek and humble of heart." For there is no hope in your way, or my way, but only his way which he invites us to share.

The last five years have, certainly, been dominated by the experience of a pandemic, we all know that. Even the mention of it makes us shiver. Please, Bishop-elect, let's not mention that again! What is so repellent about it? In an instant, we were asked and even commanded into a state of isolation. In homes, hospitals, care facilities, we went into a self-protective mode, one that was also an effort seemingly to protect others from what we might be carrying and transmitting. It was a world-wide drawing away from others, and too often, into ourselves. And for the human heart, not made for isolation but for communion, this is a scary, repellent and, in the end, a deadly thing.

But though this extraordinary experience is not the norm, God forbid, the experience of isolation is more typical than one might first notice. For even before the COVID-19 virus, a pandemic of isolation was already underway. For centuries the modern person had been turning in on himself and herself as into a concerted effort of self-actualization, self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction. Drawing away from the divine and into ourselves.

The poet Matthew Arnold spoke of this increasing isolation in this amazing poem “Dover Beach” of 1867, when he recognized a spiritual epidemic breaking out all around him where the God of Faith was being supplanted by the God of Science and Industry. He said in part in this poem, “... *The sea of faith, was once, too, at the full, and round earth shore lay like folds of a bright girdle furled. But now I only hear its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, retreating, to the breath of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear and naked shingles of the world.*”

Even before any virus spread throughout this world in 2019 and beyond, already an epidemic of isolation and alienation from God was already underway. And while in many ways we seem to have returned to normal, that normal is still, in many ways, this type of epidemic.

But into this place of lifelessness Jesus utters his perennial and eternal call of hope, not isolation but rather, “Rise, let us be on our way.” He offers a path to go with him to life and life in abundance! While his words from the near end the Gospel had already been making this invitation. Throughout the entirety of the Gospels, we see Jesus already making this invitation to life along the way. To Him, our only hope. His cross and His resurrection, the way into which he invites us all to follow and share.

The Biblical word for rise, *egeiro*, already has appeared before that citation, 25 other times across the Gospel. Jesus is saying over and over again rise. Rise. Rise to life. The first one, the command of the angel to Saint Joseph, “Rise, take the child and his mother and flee Egypt,” and “Rise, take the child and his mother. Go to the land of Israel for those who are seeking the child's life are dead.”

And then across the Gospel all kinds of occasions of healings when Jesus invites the sick person to rise. The feverish mother-in-law of Peter. The paralytic, “Rise, take your bed and go home.” The dead daughter of the synagogue leader, “Jesus took her by the hand and the girl arose.”

Jesus's command to his disciples, “As you go forth proclaim the Good News, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.”

And then of course Jesus' command near the end of the Gospel after the transfiguration, “Rise, and do not be afraid.”

And then there are the predictions of his own saving resurrection — that he'll be killed on the third day and be raised.

And then finally Jesus's own resurrection, when the angel says to the women who replied, “Do not be afraid! Know that you are seeking Jesus crucified. He's not here for he has been raised, just as he said.”

Jesus's entire mission for us is to rise with him and be on our way to life in abundance. And his Sacred Heart longs for each of us to go with him to life. Now is the hour for us to rise and be on our way, his way, and we do not rise alone.

We do not rise alone because we gather here today at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, in this splendid memorial to the Mother of God, whose will being so perfectly conformed to that of her son, too, is on a mission that we might rise and be on our way to the Father.

Central in this beautiful cathedral, of course, is the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. You can't miss her, can you? There we see Jesus, as the divine Son of God, has been shown his way — the way of the cross — as the angels Gabriel and Michael hold the instruments of his passion. Saint Michael, on the left corner, holds a spear and the wine-soaked sponge and the crown of thorns. St. Gabriel, on the right side, holds the cross in its nails.

With the instinct of a child, Jesus in awe of the vision that has been provided for Him, flees to his mother who supports Him and the face of the vision of the cross. Her gaze though, significantly, is turned toward us saying, “This is your way too.” Her invitation, together with her Son, is to us rise let us be on our way for her way, too, is the Lord's way as we see in her appearance along the Stations of the Cross and then at the foot of the Cross when Jesus gives her to us as our mother.

Since our baptisms, we have all been set on our way – which is His way – to the cross and saving resurrection. So, we need not fear, for we have a mother who will gently, faithfully protect us with her prayers along the way. And while each of us already is on our way, God wants more for us. God wants more. But we cannot find more if we remain where we are. Jesus has much more. His life in abundance he promises, if we'll but rise and be on our way. And let's go the way that is most certain and most empowered – *ad Jesum per Mariam* – to Jesus through Mary.

Our Mother of Perpetual Help, we are ready to go with your son Jesus all the way to the cross and the resurrection, to rise and be on his way, to rise and be on our way. So, in a fear, doubt, listlessness, lifelessness, isolation — now is the time. Let's go.