

- One day St. John Vianney, who is the patron saint of parish priests, saw an old man sitting in his church with his attention focused calmly, but intently on the tabernacle.
- So St. John asked the old man what he was doing, to which the old man replied, “I look at Him, and He looks at me” – a simple response welling forth from the richness of a simple but sublime faith.
- This anecdote from the life of the holy priest of Ars has always edified and delighted me. This man had his priorities straight; he knew exactly where his focus should be.
- As we enter into the second month of our “Stay at Home” order, it’s good for us to ask ourselves where our focus is. As our world continues this period of decreased activity, and much of our former busyness remains stripped away, what garners our attention?
- With every passing week I am hearing of more and more people who are being seriously impacted by the Coronavirus: loss of jobs, loss of health – even loss of life.
- And with Governor Cooper’s extension on our statewide stay at home order, it seems like it’s still going to be a long time before we can get back to some real sense of normalcy.
- So how do we cope with the growing anxiety in our society right now as all of us are longing to get back to life as normal? How do we tame whatever fears or worries that plague us?
- Ever since we entered into this crisis, I’ve been exhorting you to live in faith, embracing whatever crosses have come into your life. Of course, I’m well aware that our faith doesn’t just grow stronger because we want it to.
- And I am acutely aware that many of you have some very real crosses in your life right now – and thus your worries are well placed and very understandable. So how do we grow in faith in the midst of very real suffering?
- This is where we must turn to today’s Gospel. More than ever, we need to focus on Jesus and listen for His voice, which is, ultimately, what our Gospel today calls us to do!
- We must learn to be obedient sheep of our Good Shepherd, reminding ourselves that Christ is with us – even when we don’t recognize His presence – and His graces are present too!
- The past two Sundays: Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday, have shown us why we need to turn to Christ and make Him the focus of our lives, just like the old man in St. John Vianney’s church.
- Through His Paschal Mystery, that is, through His suffering, death, and resurrection, Christ Jesus has overcome sin and even death itself. He’s made salvation possible for us. And even more than that, our Lord desires to pour out His mercy upon us.
- In allowing the Roman soldier to pierce His heart so ruthlessly with a lance, our Lord not only opened up for us the Sacramental life of the Church, but He opened the floodgates of His mercy and compassion.
- Moreover, His mercy and compassion are for all people – most especially the worst of sinners. Those who have offended our Lord the most are the very people who have the greatest right to His mercy – if only we’re humble enough to seek it.
- Yet, how many of us have allowed our love for the Lord to cool in these past several weeks in which we’ve not been allowed to have public Mass? One of the great tragedies of this crisis is that so many people are getting out of the habit of worshipping God.

- This is why I'm so grateful to know that so many of you are at least tuning in to Mass via our livestreaming efforts. While I know it's not ideal, and while some of the technical glitches we've had have been vexing, this is *a lot* better than nothing.
- Yet the question remains: are we growing closer to our Lord in this time? Are we using whatever extra time we have in our schedule to pray more? Are we still worshiping God, even if we cannot go to Mass? What is capturing most of our attention?
- Just as we must not let worry and anxiety dominate our lives, no matter how understandable such anxiety may be, we must also not let idle pursuits like binging on Netflix take over our lives either!
- The extra time that so many have on their hands right now is a great opportunity for drawing closer to our Lord and giving Him the praise and honor that He is due – and that we so often neglect when we're busy! So let me give you a few suggestions on how to focus on our Lord and draw closer to Him.
- First of all, if you don't have time set aside in your day for silent prayer, make time – even if it's only 15 or 20 minutes to stay with Christ and listen to Him. For most people, doing this first thing in the morning before the day gets away from you is best.
- Read Scripture, especially the Gospels. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you read. And meditate on Christ's humanity, which was the battleground for our salvation.
- As the prophet Isaiah tells us, it's by His wounds that we are healed. We're redeemed because Jesus, as man, allowed Himself to be punished so cruelly, even unto death.
- Had our Lord not taken on our human flesh and become man, we would not be saved – not to mention all the other wonderful things Christ did as a man on this earth.
- So, meditating on His humanity draws us into the mystery of our redemption and fosters within us a greater love and appreciation for our Lord.
- Lastly, look for ways to imitate Christ and serve those in need, even in this time of social distancing. If you are able, give to the poor. Check up on elderly neighbors or call those whom you know are all alone right now.
- And make amends with anyone with whom you may be at odds. Times of widespread suffering are always great moments to bury any hatchets that need burying and to reconcile with others, for suffering often humbles our hearts and eases this process.
- Brothers and sisters, do not let this time of crisis pass you without drawing closer to our Lord and growing in holiness. This we can do by turning to Him, abiding with Him, listening to Him, and imitating Him.
- May we cast all our worries and anxieties upon our sovereign Lord, and may He be the focus of our lives.