

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

14 April 2020

First, a few things you should know:

- Once again, I invite you to view our Easter Video Project on You-Tube. In addition to the link on this website, you may also visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/holyrosarythorold/>

One of the recommendations being made to help stop the spread of the Covid 19 virus is to avoid touching your face. Why is it whenever a medical official repeats this advice I have an uncontrollable desire to scratch my nose or rub my eyes? Perhaps, it is because being Catholic is a very tactile experience. We are always touching things. When you enter the Church you touch the Holy Water in the font by the door before blessing yourself. When you make the Sign of the Cross you touch your forehead, chest and shoulders. When you receive Communion (whether in the hand or on the tongue) you touch the Host. Until recently, at the Sign of Peace people often shook hands, hugged or kissed each other. At Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick and Ordination, the hands and/or forehead are anointed with oil. Our sacramental tradition uses such physical contact to express important truths of our faith.

In today's Gospel, the risen Christ tells Mary Magdalene not to cling to him until he ascends to the Father. You can understand why Mary might be tempted to embrace him. When she left for the tomb earlier that morning she was likely heartbroken. Someone she loved and followed as a disciple had been betrayed, denied, arrested, put on trial, tortured, dragged to his place of execution, ridiculed and killed in a very painful and humiliating manner. She had no hope of ever seeing him alive again. But, now he had risen from the dead and she could talk with him. She must have longed to have physical contact with him. John's Gospel doesn't indicate why it was necessary to avoid contact or when Jesus ascended to His father. We know a week after the incident with Mary Magdalene Jesus invited Thomas to touch his hands and side. In Luke's Gospel, he asks for a piece of fish to eat to prove he is not a ghost. Jesus understood the importance of physical contact to express important messages. One just had to wait for the appropriate time to do so.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, Catholics and other people of faith must avoid physical contact to stop the spread of the virus. For individuals from certain cultures or religious traditions (including Catholics) this may prove more challenging because they are so used to touching others. Of course, it is still possible for Catholics to make the Sign of the Cross and touch certain objects like Rosary beads, Holy Water or a Crucifix, but they must be careful when doing so. Like Mary Magdalene, we have to wait for the appropriate time to fully express our feelings. It may be necessary to communicate our emotions in other ways like words or gestures which do not involve physical contact. It is part of the sacrifice we have to make as Catholics for the common good and to align our lives with Christ.

I am still struggling to resist the temptation to scratch my nose and rub my eyes when told not to touch my face. I still have to remind myself not to shake hands at the Sign of Peace during Mass. But, I know sometime in the future, I won't have to worry about doing so anymore.