My Dear Parish Family,

This weekend the Church celebrates Laetare Sunday. It is the Sunday when the priests customarily exchange the violet vestment of penance for the rose vestments of rejoicing. The Latin word Laetare actually means rejoice. It is here, in the middle of Lent, when the Church reminds us of the reason we undergo the rigors of penance. It is with the soul’s eye focused on the hope of the Paschal Mystery to come, that we rejoice today. The world has been forced into a kind of penance and darkness by the pandemic we now face and recently there have been some hopeful signs that we could soon emerge from the trial we are enduring. It is with this hope that I encourage you rejoice with hope.

However, just as the Church still must undergo the remaining time of Lent, so the world will have to continue for some period under the difficulties of quarantine, social distancing and the like. However, we do not have to go through this alone. The Church has a beautiful history of uniting universally in prayer. One may think here that I am speaking of the Mass. Unfortunately, we are not able to unite physically for Holy Mass, though I encourage you all to pray along with Mass where you can find it through the power of multimedia. Instead, I am referring to what is commonly known as the Liturgy of the Hours, or Divine Office. This is a series of prayer times throughout the day when every priest and deacon, religious and many lay faithful unite in prayer.

The Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office or the Work of God (Opus Dei), is the daily prayer of the Church, marking the hours of each day and sanctifying the day with prayer. The Hours are a meditative dialogue on the mystery of Christ, using scripture and prayer. At times the dialogue is between the Church or individual soul and God; at times it is a dialogue among the members of the Church; and at times it is even between the Church and the world. The Divine Office "is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom. It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father." (SC 84) The dialogue is always held, however, in the presence of God and using the words and wisdom of God. Each of the five canonical Hours includes selections from the Psalms that culminate in a scriptural proclamation. The two most important or hinge Hours are Morning and Evening Prayer. These each include a Gospel canticle: the Canticle of Zechariah from Luke 1:68-79 for Morning Prayer (known as the Benedictus), and the Canticle of Mary from Luke 1:46-55 for Evening Prayer (known as the Magnificat). The Gospel canticle acts as a kind of meditative extension of the scriptural proclamation in light of the Christ event. Morning and Evening Prayer also include intercessions that flow from the scriptural proclamation just as the Psalms prepare for it.

In the Hours, the royal priesthood of the baptized is exercised, and this sacrifice of praise is thus connected to the sacrifice of the Eucharist, both preparing for and flowing from the Mass.

"The hymns and litanies of the Liturgy of the Hours integrate the prayer of the psalms into the age of the Church, expressing the symbolism of the time of day, the liturgical season, or the feast being celebrated. Moreover, the reading from the Word of God at each Hour (with the subsequent responses or troparia) and readings from the Fathers and
spiritual masters at certain Hours, reveal more deeply the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, assist in understanding the psalms, and prepare for silent prayer." (USCCB)

I would like to encourage everyone to begin to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, uniting your prayers with your Bishop, priests, deacons and religious here in the Diocese of Charlotte and throughout the world.

This ancient form of prayer has a modern way to access it using technology. I have found the “app” IBreviary very easy to use. It is so easy, in fact, that I have used it at 2:30 in the morning as I was preparing to hike somewhere in the mountains near Cashiers, NC! If can work for me then, I’m sure it can work for you!

Keep safe and prayerful and hopeful.

God bless,
Fr. Roux