



SOLIDARITY AND HOPE IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC

A Personal Reflection

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Listening to our brother, Bishop Jorge, started me thinking about the past months in a different way.

In all that has happened, what has been shown to me? What is this virus FOR? Or, as he asks, “What can we learn from this time?”

I take that to prayer.

At this point in my life, my basic prayer-stance now is to *LISTEN* -- to all that happens in life and with others and to myself.

My prayerful listening is not passive. This is *WORK*: the work of reflection, the discipline of paying attention. It requires staying informed. It requires reflective *ENGAGEMENT* with the world, with the things that happen. I have to take the time to sit outside with a cup of coffee and maybe, in addition to my rosary or Liturgy of the Hours, I bring my smartphone.

Here in Upstate New York, I accompany my brothers as they move into their final years, and I’ve listened to the stories they tell about their lives in Holy Cross.

I have come to believe that *ALL* the events and relationships we have in life can show us what they are FOR, what their purpose is (or what their purpose WAS). What my brothers believe about the story of their religious life has a lot to do with how they face the challenges that come with older age: the diminishment and illness.

In his first point, Bishop Jorge cites Pope Francis and says that the virus has “unmasked” the way we were living. We were not living by what we really value, but chasing what fascinated us. Until we meet hardship, most of us are asleep and living under the illusion that we have perfect health and all the time in the world to pursue what we want, instead of what really nourishes, sustains us.

And he asks: What can we learn from this time?

I think about his statement that “we must live this time as a time of grace and conversion.” This past year, on top of all the news and indecision about the virus, a very angry election season here in the States filled

television, newspapers and social media with loud accusations that weren't helping me live this time as a time of grace and conversion.

Seeing this, I have begun to pray in a wider way: I've turned off the TV, taken times to shut off the phone. I've begun to spend the quiet hours reading, painting and writing. When I took time away from the noise, I began to see that this time could be a gift in a way, a time, as he says, for a deeper conversion.

At first, I felt guilty for this: There is a lot of people suffering, and I wasn't able to go off the property to help those suffering without endangering those I live with. I would ask myself, as Bishop Jorge mentions in his ninth point, where was MY apostolic zeal?

I want to do what some of my family members are doing in Washington DC: as medical personnel and nurses they are working directly with victims of the virus on the "front line." Bishop Jorge said that they are the ones Pope Francis calls "the silent workers." I want to be one!

Well ... even though we haven't had the virus strike here directly, it's come close as some of our staff have become positive. And there's the secondary suffering, which can be just as terrible: an elderly brother here whose beloved sister died in a distant town could not go to her funeral because it would likely have killed him. He had to handle his grieving with no wake or funeral to help with his closure.

But there are good things, too. My five sisters and I began to zoom-call each other once a week, and surprisingly for all of us we've kept it up, every week, for one hour, for the past eight months since the virus started to spread. We share stories of how the week has gone, and we have discovered, during this fearful time, that our love for one another is more important than anything else. In our own way we have overcome our individualism and founded a support group.

So, the virus has affected everybody in different ways. I have to learn to see my OWN mission here, to use the time well, and not disparage the role I've been asked to play.

I still don't completely understand what I've seemingly been asked to do. Some days in the face of all that is happening, I doubt its worth. That doubt is a stone, indeed, that paralyzes me, as Pope Francis says.

But, as Bishop Jorge mentions, it's Advent, a time of active waiting, waiting with patience and faith, because we believe the great Lord of our lives will wake us up. As Merton says: "In ALL the situations of life the 'will of God' comes to us ... as an interior invitation."

So, of course my fellow community members, I will keep praying. And one of my intentions will be to better understand the Lord's invitation, the mission that I've been given here in this quiet Hudson Valley while the virus rages around the world.

I want to see how the Lord goes before me on this journey, and will "remove the stones that paralyze me."

I have that hope. God bless.