

Spiritual Reflection – January, 2021

As a reflection for this month, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on and to remember the people and families who suffer the most during this COVID-19 pandemic. We now see almost 1.85 million people died of the disease worldwide, almost 16,000 in Canada and over 354,000 in our neighbouring country. Each one of them has loved ones and family who mourn their loss. Among them are people who risk their lives day in and day out to ensure that we still have some basic services and normalities, those who take care of us if we do get sick, and many are our teachers and our spiritual leaders. In them, we are all somehow represented, and with whom we can readily identify – sinners and saints, rich and poor, young and old. Besides our natural empathy for their loss with a prayer for their souls and their families, we should perhaps also thank them collectively for how they have passed as a reminder of how we can continue to live. Part of the gratitude with which we can honour these lives is for us to seriously consider how we should experience this period of upheavals that challenges our personal and societal norms and relationships, our religious practices and even our faith in God. Does God mean for us to simply hunker down, and quietly hope to be the lucky ones surviving through this period? Or is there a serious intention in His plan of salvation for this generation? In the bible, Jesus says that not a single sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing it. Also, He said that we Christians are one body with Christ Jesus as the Godhead. How can it be then that God allows such an overwhelming pandemic to happen just by chance with no intentions in His plan of salvation? If we believe that God is a truly personal and intimately caring God, then this whole drama should become one of discovering and responding both individually and collectively to the meaning of God's Will in all that is happening around us.

Individually, this can prove to be an opportunity for deeper discovery of our spiritual health. Having to spend more time alone without the usual social interactions and support through communal sharing like attending Mass together and receiving physically the Holy Eucharist, we face the prospect of having to honestly review our commitment to consciously nurture our personal life of Faith or just letting it slide and assimilate into the secular culture around us. If we do decide for faith, this period can be an opportunity for experiencing grace in a more intimate way through prayers in relative solitude. Time spent reading the scriptures can become an uplifting moment of inspiration and consolation, and finally, the more relaxed schedule can provide more time for doing the "small things with greater love" that can take on bigger and more eternal meaning. That is, this can be a period of personal spiritual renewal and growth.

Collectively, this pandemic experience has not only demonstrated some ills and injustices of our society, but also highlighted our common empathy for the wellbeing of others as we can see in many selfless communal acts of charity. It has made it clearer than ever before, the interconnectedness of all humanity and the global impact of our collective actions. In the last few months, most people have come to realize that we can be truly safe from this virus only when most, if not all, peoples of this world, irrespective from poor or rich countries, north or south, can get the basic level of care and immunity from the virus. This effectively mandates that all

peoples must reach out to one another through a basic level of health care and equable sharing of the vaccines. Echoing Pope Francis, “there cannot be status quo coming out of this crisis, we can come out of this crisis better as a caring and responsible human family or as more antagonistic and dissociated communities vying for self-interested gains through the neglect of, and at the expense of the poor”.

Pope Francis urges for “solidarity” in this time of trial with our medical and front line workers, with those who suffer losses, with our scientific community in discovering effective cure and prevention, and most of all with the poor and the dis-advantaged among us. We, as Vincentians, already understand and practise the reaching out to the poor and the dis-advantaged. But now, we also have the opportunity to help affect the outcome of this crisis by uniting our prayers with our Pope for solidarity through the intercession of Mary our mother. One of the tangible ways of doing this is to add on to our schedule the daily recital of the holy Rosary with our Pope’s intentions.

As Winston Churchill famously warn not to let a good crisis go to waste. Perhaps we can do our part to not let this good crisis go to waste by actively participating in bringing about a spiritual renewal of ourselves, our church and our society.

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