

Spiritually Speaking

Confinement, a time to turn to God

By **Thankachan Joseph SDB, Pastor, St. Patrick Church**

Our country has actually reached its zenith in its number of cases of the COVID-19 virus. All government agencies, all countries, in fact, are asking their people to remain in quarantine as the only way to control the spread of this virus. We are really threatened by the speed with which it spreads.

I just thought to bring for our reflection a few scriptural passages to help understand this particular situation. I hope some of you attended the papal blessing called Urbi et Orbi, at which the pope gave reassurance to humanity all around world with the scriptural passage, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" (Mk 4:38) Like those disciples in the gospel of Mark, we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm of COVID-19.

We feel like those disciples at this moment; we are on the same boat, caught up by the storm of Coronavirus; panic has stricken all around us, which causes lots of uncertainties, fear, anxiety, and even depression. On this boat are all of us. Just like those disciples, who shout and yell anxiously with one voice, saying, "We are perishing!" (v. 38), so we, too, have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we face this, remembering that confinement is the only solution at this juncture.

From the book of the Old Testament, the 2nd book of Chronicles, we read, "Whenever I send an epidemic on my people, if they pray to me and repent and turn away from the evil they have been doing, then I will hear them in heaven, and forgive their sins, and make their land prosperous again." (2 Chronicles 7:13-14) Why Worry when We Can Pray and put our trust in the Lord, who tells everyone, "Fear not, I am with you," and follow the Necessary Precautions? The fifth Sunday of Lent invites everyone to "Take the stone away" (John 11: 39) from our tombs where we try to hide ourselves from the Lord.

When we drive on the road, we need to follow the traffic restrictions, or when we are working in an institution, we need to follow the rules and regulations of that particular institution in which we serve. When it comes to God and human beings, there, too, exist certain directions and commands of God to be followed, inscribed in the scriptures. When it comes to the commandments of God, we have many excuses to avert all those. This present confinement is a time to look into oneself and to answer Christ's request, "Take away the stone that covers the dead man in you," the stone that leads us away from God and breaks the true relationship with God. Sin is the breaking of relationships with God (Adam and Eve), with others (Cain and Abel,) and with self (tower of Babel). God continuously calls us to conversion and waits for us to return to him like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, or rather, he runs after us like the hound of heaven in the poem of Francis Thompson.

This time of quarantine offers time to realize this loving God is always after us, when we run away from him, like the hunter's dog chases the wounded animal to the hunter. He is with us in all our wounded moments to comfort us, heal us, bring us back to him. Psalm 91: 5-6: "You need not fear any dangers at night or sudden attacks during the day or the plague" of COVID 19 that threatens the whole universe. "God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you wherever you go." Ps 91:11. The stones that we need to remove from our life for the Lord to enter into our life are the following:

a) Refusal to help those in need: This beautiful time of quarantine is a time to acknowledge those moments we have not even reached out to our family members when they needed us most in their life. The Lord has placed before us all an opportunity to do the corporal works of mercy. We cannot ignore the pain and struggle of someone else and pretend to live a happy and contented life. The

story of the Rich Man and Lazarus helps us to reflect Mt. 25: 41-46; Lk. 16: 19f.

b) Waste of Talents: This confinement period invites everyone to see the numerous blessings we have wasted in our life. The time we have looked at others but failed to identify our talents. The Lord has blessed everyone according to his or her talents. Instead of thanking and being grateful to God for the numerous blessings that we receive each day, like the man who got one talent, we look at someone else's gifts and blessings and waste our lives, we forget to live our lives to the fullest. The one who buried the talent is condemned. (Mt. 25.24-30)

c) Unwillingness to Forgive: At this moment of introspection, the Lord God asks each and every one of us to forgive the mistakes of others. We might examine the case of the one who received forgiveness from the king but was not able to grant pardon to the man who owed him only a hundred dinar. When others are able to deal with my shortcomings and frailties, why can't I forgive my members of the family. (Mt. 18:21f).

d) Pharisaism: We can search for the times of pharisaic behavior in our lives, treating others as did the pharisees, pinpointing the mistakes of someone else and finding happiness in doing so. One example is the parable of the tax collector and the publican. This particular period is inviting all of us to acquire the habit of humility, not condemning others and despising them. (Lk. 18:11-12; Mt. 23:13f)

e) Refusal to accept: Very clearly Jesus explains this through the parable of the prodigal son. When he returns home, the father who lost everything is ready to forgive his younger son and makes a feast and rejoices at that moment. Whereas many are like the older son, waiting for opportunities to ditch others and keep on pecking on the mistakes of someone. (Lk. 15: 25-32)

h) Ingratitude: The Lord is showering his numerous blessings upon every one of us every day. Most of us are like the nine lepers who were healed by the Lord but who never felt the need to return to the Lord and thank him for the healing they experienced, except the Samaritan. This period of isolation is time to acknowledge and thank the Lord for all the numerous blessings that we have received in our lives up to now. We have received much more than we truly need or deserve. (Lk 17:11-19)

i) Selfishness and hoarding: The confinement period is also inviting us to look into our lives for the times we have hoarded things for our selfish motives, like the rich fool in the parable of Luke's gospel. Instead of sharing his gifts and blessings with others and thanking the Lord, are we like the rich fool, amassing things for our own well-being, instead of caring and sharing with the ones who need our helping hands? We lack trust in the Lord and trust in the material things of the world. (Lk 12:13-21)

j) Casting aspersions: In the gospel of Luke, Simon invites the Lord to his house for the meal at which Mary of Magdala comes into his presence and washes his feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair, and she turns into a new person; whereas Simon the Pharisee remains the same and keeps condemning others. The Lord calls us to conversion every day. Instead of judging the character of others, we must try to convert ourselves every day. (Lk 7:39f)

Let us make use of this confinement. God does not keep track of our sins/evildoings (cf. Lk. 15:21f). But we ourselves do. Our guilty conscience torments us (Lady Macbeth, Herod). We punish ourselves. Readiness to forgive and contrition are more important than whispering sins to the priest. Readiness to change is a necessary condition. (Zacheus Lk. 19:8). No sacrament works like magic - either it is an occasion for personal transformation or empty ritual. Confession is the celebration of our homecoming. Either we can enter the home like the prodigal son in the parable or sneak back into the pigsty.

Being a leader during stressful times

By **Dr. Carmelo A. Di Salvo**



Dr. Carmelo A. Di Salvo

At first, when 'business as usual' has changed our lives, things may not be too difficult. However, when the reality of what has happened hits home or has become the new normal, life can become very difficult for us, our families and those around us. Looking around our country and world today you may think life is out of control and the pressures around you are too great to handle. But perhaps today presents us an opportunity to be the 'leader' that a neighbor, your church, organization or community needs to get them through this difficult time.

In their book, The Leadership Challenge, writers James Kouzes and Barry Posner assert through research and analysis of over 75,000 responses, that successful leaders exhibit five different practices: "Model the Way," "Inspire a Shared Vision," "Challenge the Process," "Enable Others to Act" and "Encourage the Heart." Those who look to leaders respond favorably when leaders employ these practices.

Throughout history there have been many leaders who have helped direct the course of a nation's destiny through difficult times. We can learn a great deal from these leaders who have persevered and touched the lives of others even through the most difficult times.

According to biographers, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill suffered many failures both at school and in his political life. But Churchill kept persevering, overcoming great odds and eventually leading his country through its most difficult times.

The key to Churchill's success as a leader may lie in the speech he delivered at Harrow, the boarding school he attended as a boy. "Never give up! Never give up!! Never, never, never-never-never-never!" he roared. Perseverance is the mark of a true leader and is something we, as leaders, should encourage others in. Let's not give up but continue to persevere.

During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale led a group of 38 nurses into the Scutari Barrack Hospital in Turkey. She'd been called to duty in response to the deplorable care being given British casualties. Thousands of sick and wounded soldiers were packed into barren corridors and lying on blood-soaked straw mats. One eyewitness called it "a vast field of suffering and misery." (Tye 2015)

Infection was rampant and rats ran wild. There was no ventilation or fresh water, the food was inedible, and there were virtually no drugs or medical supplies. Amputations were performed without anesthesia in full view of other patients, and most amputees quickly succumbed to gangrene. (Tye 2015)

In a two-year period in the depths of this healthcare crisis, Nightingale established nursing as a respected profession and the hospital as we know it today. She developed the first modern hospital nursing, pharmacy, laundry and nutrition services. As Mark Bostridge wrote in his recent biography Florence Nightingale: The Making of an Icon, "By the end of the war, the Scutari hospitals had been transformed into efficiently-organized, smooth-running operations."

Think you're not a leader or do not have the ability to be one? Research concludes that leadership is not so much something one is born with, but something anyone can learn. You don't need to be the head of a business, a church or any organization to be a leader and influence change.

Here are some ideas:

Model the Way, show, don't just tell. Have a great idea on how to serve others? Enlist some help and lead the way.

Inspire a Shared Vision, think 'outside-the-box' about what is a possible, attainable future and enlist others who share your vision.

Challenge the Process, ask how can we use innovation for a better future? Today, telemedicine is gaining popularity and even church services by Skype and Messenger are happening.

Enable Others to Act, now is the time to put aside office politics and other hindrances to let everyone shine and contribute to the team.

Encourage the Heart, with necessary social distancing, many people feel more isolated than ever. Reach out to the lonely, elderly and those affected by stressful times to be an encouragement to them.

With all the change and fear that's going around, you can make a difference to help others today.

Dr. Carmelo A. Di Salvo is hospice chaplain with MCHD, president of PAX Global Traders, LLC, and pastor of Valby Lutheran Church. He has written other articles and presented on leadership, innovation and strategic foresight.

Scholarship application date extended

The application date for the Bob and Betty Rietmann scholarships for lone High School students has been extended from April 1 to April 10. Application forms are available at ione.k12.or.us under scholarships and financial aid.

Completed forms should be mailed to Betty Rietmann, PO Box 27, Ione, OR 97843 and must be postmarked by April 10. For additional information, email mrsrietmann@gmail.com.

Transfer stations open on Saturdays

Morrow County transfer stations, north and south, will be open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. until further notice. To limit contact, waste will be free of charge. Both transfer stations will be closed on Sundays.

The commissioners have made this decision because of the COVID-19 pandemic and in efforts to still supply the services to Morrow County residents.

For additional information contact Morrow County Public Works at 541-989-9500.

The commissioners

Death Notices

O.L. "Bud" Laney – Former Gilliam County resident, O.L. "Bud" Laney, 75, of Heppner, died Sunday, March 29 at his home. He was born March 15, 1945 at Clovis, NM. No service is planned at this time. Sweeney Mortuary of Heppner is in care of arrangements.

Honesty • Integrity • Independent

VOTE

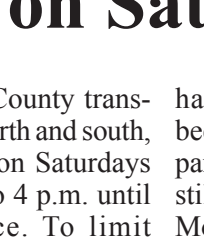
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!! REWARD !!

Missing!
Black and White
Male Cat
Balm Fork Creek



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