

1. From Fr. Yake's Desk

We are by nature social beings and so it is to be expected that the isolation imposed due to the need to arrest the spread of COVID 19 presents everyone with a unique challenge. The media has been supportive by offering interviews by specialists in human behaviour like psychologists. They propose helpful information as to how persons might remain healthy psychologically at this time when emotions register instability. That which has been left unaddressed is a view of the present situation of aloneness from a spiritual perspective.

Loneliness, being disturbed by one's aloneness, has previously been noted as a normative trait of our culture that structures a culture of avoidance of oneself by ever pointing persons away from themselves to the outer world; over-stimulation with non-stop distractions and attractions, and of course, capitalism depends on the constant, uninterrupted drive to increase one's wealth. Sr. Mary-Jo Leddy has interpreted the modern addiction to shopping as a means express personal power when the major threatening issues of our time, like war, pollution, and the economy cause a sense of overwhelming powerlessness. In his conclusion to a reflection on *Solitude and Community* Rev. Henri Nouwen wrote in part, "Our interpersonal relationships have been tainted by fear and anger; our common tasks have been threatened by fragmentation and individualization...." (p. 33) Granted, he was speaking of religious life but we may assume that his observations may apply to those living in the wider culture. When publishing my book, *Star Wars and the Message of Jesus*, back in 1985, the publisher suggested putting the word, lonely/loneliness early in the book or even in the title because research had demonstrated that persons will purchase a book, perhaps seeing it as a self-help book, whose message promises to alleviate painful loneliness; even in crowds engaged in many activities individuals are lonesome. If loneliness already stresses many to escape its attendant suffering, perhaps to an addiction, then how much more will mandated social distancing exacerbate the problem?

How might religious faith contribute positively to alleviate this suffering?

First of all, socializing is desired because it enables communication and the quality that makes communication of great value is the love that it facilitates to pass between persons. Communication, from the Latin (L), *cum munio*, meaning, to build with, permits relationships of intimacy and intimacy, from *intimare*, (L) means to put or place inside. Human beings are

warmth-seeking creatures who seek communication that can result in intimacy, of belonging to and feeling cherished by another. The media has been warning of abusive relationships that can increase in this crisis; a reminder that sinners find maintaining the spirit of intimate communication demanded by our social selves very challenging. The spirit of a marriage, for example, is the degree of love that passes between husband and wife, and it is this spirit that is apprehended by the children from which they access their sense of stability and security.

Secondly, Christianity is essentially about socializing, so much so, that love of neighbour is the law; relationships must acknowledge the dignity and worth of persons. Jesus' only recorded prayer was, 'that they may all be one;' (John 17: 21) this is an expression of intimacy, of unity. And it is a huge community: The Christian creed affirms that we believe in "the communion of saints." Christians belong to an amazing social network that the evangelist, St. Matthew, called the Church: the Kahal (Hb) the religious assembly, the ekklesia (Gk) the assembly of all those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Church (from the, *kyriakon*, (Gk) 'the Lord's House'). "It designates the assembly of those whom God's Word "convokes," i. e. gathers together to form the People of God, and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 777): the Church Triumphant (the Holy Souls in Beatitude), the Church Suffering (the Holy Souls in Purgatory), and the Church Militant (we who struggle to maintain our baptismal commitment). That which unites the Church is the love that God is (1 John 4: 8) because the spirit that creates the Church is the love that passes between the Father and the Son. In fact, Jesus came to give us his spirit to be our life. Basic Christian community belongs to all its members and can be accessed through communication with the Holy Spirit called prayer as the activity that makes Jesus' Spirit operative in persons' lives and on into the world. Of course, God, the Blessed Trinity, a society of divine persons, is joined as the head of the Church. In this society communication to intimacy is perfect because it is all love and lacks the weakness of sin.

Thirdly, every human being possesses an immortal soul that is capable of the profound communication that Jesus has revealed by giving us his Spirit. Persons' inner world is greater than the outer world that so attracts and distracts because, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, we limited creatures can be in intimate communication with unlimited divinity. Some persons have totally abandoned the world of finite pleasures, like Buddhist monks, in order to be engaged in contemplation alone with God. For example, St. Antony of the desert and others went into the desert, the place to escape the

noise of the city and to discover silence, the language that God speaks. The word, *monas*, (Greek) means alone, and so persons, monks, have gone to monasteries in order to be alone and able to pray without the distractions of the world. For practical reasons monasteries became communities of monks wherein the chores required for one's bodily needs could be taken care of while still affording a life of solitude and prayer. In the conclusion alluded to above Rev. Henri Nouwen continued, "...solitude...a place from where a response to the emergencies of our time can be made....solitude as the place where mature intimacy can develop between people....where we can discover or rediscover our common vocation...the place where our great encounter with God can take place." (p. 33).

In my book, *Talking to Teens About the Mass*, I wrote of Christian solidarity,

"Solidarity arises when we experience an intensely dramatic, extraordinary, and even shocking happening where we become vividly and powerfully engaged. According to psychiatrist and author, M. Scott Peck, community develops only in response to crisis; in its two Chinese characters (pronounced, *way-chi*) it means *opportunity* and *danger*. Normally preoccupied with self, individuals need some intruding event to grab their attention, pull them away, and insert them into another reality." (p. 216)

The present crisis, as alluded to in my last note, can be an opportunity to develop a monastic culture and spirituality. We can be innovative by creating a Christian community of prayerful solidarity that our regular celebration of the Eucharist seeks to create.

2. Sr. Dorica Sever, FMM, administrator of the Catholic missions of Baker Lake and Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut extended a note of thanks for 'Knits for the North.' She wrote, "To all the parishioners of the parishes: St. John the Baptist, Holy Guardians Angels, St. Peter's, and the Knights of Columbus. Thank you very much for the knitted items that you sent to our missions in Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut. You gave much joy and warmth to our kids during the long winter that we are now experiencing."

3. Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic

The gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (*Rom 12: 12*). The words written by Saint Paul to the Church of Rome resonate throughout the entire history of the Church and guide the judgment of the faithful in the face of all suffering, sickness and calamity.

The present moment in which the whole of humanity, threatened by an invisible and insidious disease, which for some time now has become part of all our lives, is marked day after day by anguished fears, new uncertainties and above all widespread physical and moral suffering.

The Church, following the example of her Divine Master, has always had the care of the sick at heart. As Saint John Paul II points out, the value of human suffering is twofold: “It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission” (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 31).

Pope Francis, too, in these recent days, has shown his paternal closeness and renewed his invitation to pray incessantly for those who are sick with the Coronavirus.

So that all those who suffer because of COVID-19, precisely in the mystery of this suffering, may rediscover “the same redemptive suffering of Christ” (*ibid.*, 30), this Apostolic Penitentiary, *ex auctoritate Summi Pontificis*, trusting in the word of Christ the Lord and considering with a spirit of faith the epidemic currently underway, to be lived in a spirit of personal conversion, grants the gift of Indulgences in accordance with the following disposition.

The *Plenary Indulgence* is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial

in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible.

Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn* 15: 13), will obtain the same gift of the *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions.

This Apostolic Penitentiary also willingly grants a *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions on the occasion of the current world epidemic, also to those faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself.

The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the *Viaticum*, entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a *Plenary Indulgence* on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, no.12).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, Health of the Sick and Help of Christians, our Advocate, help suffering humanity, saving us from the evil of this pandemic and obtaining for us every good necessary for our salvation and sanctification.

The present Decree is valid notwithstanding any provision to the contrary.

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on 19 March 2020.

✠ Mauro Cardinal Piacenza

Major Penitentiary

Krzysztof Nykiel

Regent

4. Other sites that offer some religious reflections:

www.TrueFaith.tv

Bishop Barron's Word on Fire at www.wordonfire.com

For The Diocesan Weekly News Bulletin contact Communications Officer,
Jennifer Hatt at: jennifer@dioceseofantigonish.ca