

## 1. From Fr. Yake's Desk

The current COVID-19 pandemic has brought the ordinary way that life was lived to an end; the activities that were routine, and from which persons drew their sense of self have ended. No one was prepared for this abrupt and challenging moment. The situation confronts everyone with the task of finding their identity from other sources, or better, to recognize that we have not changed but that our lifestyle has been radically modified.

Religiously this is also true, especially with the closure of churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, etc. Even as persons cannot self-identify with the institutional face of their religion they need to recognize that enabling a personally-owned religious faith is the objective of communal celebrations of faith; the present circumstance evokes a heart-felt trust in God that was less intense with former religious practice.

A fine example of this reality may be found in the experience of the Prophet Ezekiel. He was trained, you might say, as is a modern seminarian, in Temple worship to enact and give visibility to faith by leading religious communal celebrations. However, just as he was about to be launched into that career came war with Babylon that saw the Temple destroyed and the people taken away into slavery. The Babylonian deportation and captivity (597 BC) was a terrible tragedy because the Temple was the overpowering national and religious symbol that unified the people and from which they accessed a strong identity. The people were leaderless and the destruction of the Temple suggested abandonment by God.

This dire situation meant a loss of hope, of being totally cut off, as imaged by the valley of dry bones (Ch. 37). The scattered bones not only imaged death, but being a pile of rubble, they portended eternal condemnation, eternal separation from God, because it was believed that only bodily-whole persons could enter heaven, a concept called *etsem*. (Today orthodox Jewish amputees are buried with the severed part.)

However, Ezekiel did not abandon his faith or his pastoral vocation due to the Exile. He was creative in ministry, so much so, that he has been dubbed, the father of Judaism. The Temple was no longer available to him but he did not see that fact as an obstacle to the exercise of traditional religion. He gathered the people and encouraged them to resist joining the paganism of the Babylonians and thereby remain trusting in Yahweh, their true shepherd, rather than worship idols. Thus Ezekiel invented the synagogue, a word from the Greek meaning, 'to bring together.' He continued to encourage a religious perspective despite the changed environment. (Even today synagogues disallow statues or pictorial representations of the deity because pagan Babylon worshipped these images of their gods. Judaism forbade claiming any image of the transcendent God, Yahweh, and this attitude was supported by the second commandment of the Decalogue.)

Israel's situation then, like ours in the midst of the exile brought on by COVID-19, exposes us to dangers beyond the obvious threat of the virus. Isolation that removes socializing can introduce emotional distress, one of which can be termed, boredom. According to Dr. John Eastwood, a Clinical Psychologist and professor at Toronto's York University, in an article entitled, *Bored Stiff*, (Summer, 2013, p. 7) stated that the first use of the word, boredom, may be found in Charles Dicken's, *Bleak House*. Boredom, 'to be a bore,' meaning being tiresome or dull, can be found in the eighteenth century. It was sometimes referred to as *nausea*, due to the feelings associated with it.

Where boredom was thought to be a threat to happiness due to being trapped in a state of apathy, depressed or disinterested in life Eastwood's research found the contrary, that, "Boredom is precisely that desire to be engaged." It is not the absence of any stressor but, "Boredom is the opposite – it is extremely stressful." In an article in, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Sept. 2012, Eastwood defined boredom as, "an aversive state of wanting, but being unable to engage in satisfying activity." Like us, captive Israel wanted their former lives back but sadly they had to adjust to a threatening reality that was suddenly thrust upon them and for which they were totally unprepared.

In Talk One of my book, *Talking to Teens About the Mass*, entitled, *It's Boring, I Don't Get Anything Out of It, I can Pray on my Own*, a discussion assisted by Raymond Pasi, F.M.S., "The Challenge of Boredom," in *Human Development*. (New York, NY: The Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development), Vol. 10, #1, 1989, p. 14-18 and Judy Zielinski, O.S.F., "Is There Life After Boredom?" in *Youth Update*. (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press), June, 1985. I found that a chronically bored person can be attracted to addictive behaviours that promise escape from the isolating effects of boredom and can be expressed in a variety of ways: hyperactivity, drug abuse, excessive television, a search for fun and kicks, sexual promiscuity, smoking, the use of alcohol, or even thoughts of suicide as the saying goes, "Bored to death," to name a few. The one who cannot be alone or attentive is not always bored. Boredom can mask other problems.

The Prophet Ezekiel's pastoral purpose was to keep his people connected to God and to keep them from enslaving idolatry. The Old Testament used the word *idolatry* to denote our scientific term, *addiction*. The classic story of the golden calf (Deuteronomy 9: 7-29) is the way our religious tradition frames the addictive experience, making the predicament of addiction understandable from a spiritual point of view.

By choosing an idol to serve as their god the Israelites of Moses' time were attempting to control God. Being their creation God was prevented from challenging them to surrender, to go beyond their perceived limits and comfort. The sin of idolatry (addiction) has two parts: Firstly, persons' high needs to manage or control life, ridding it of suffering, bids them to deny their own transcendence and historic agency—that they can surpass their present level of achievement. So they give power over them to things; i. e. the addiction. Secondly, God's holiness is denied; God is not to be trusted as one who loves and cares for them. Addicts idolize themselves in their idolatry in order to escape responsibility and to create a world that they perceive to be safe and pain free. What they actually achieve is to destroy their chances for happiness and that of those close to them.

The hallmark of the spiritual life is being real and taking responsibility for

ourselves. Theologian Raymond Panikkar claimed that we were given two life-creating gifts from the Creator: existence and faith. Existence pertains to the fact of our aliveness as human beings with unborn potential. Faith is the choice that we make to enable our lives to be meaningful, to risk the work of giving birth to our hidden talents. Addiction may be viewed as a decision to hold on to existence alone as meaningful. One's existence becomes authentic living only by the exercise of faith; to risk to become more than what one is. Boredom can be a sign that one is not growing, not taking steps to transcend self by actualizing one's potential. Ezekiel was convinced that the Exile did not define Israel; they were still Yahweh's chosen with a unique destiny to enable God's plan of salvation.

The wealthy business executive-turned-ascetic monk, Carlo Carretto, wrote of being converted in his teens by a missionary who led a school retreat: He admitted, "What I remember most of all was how boring and out-dated the sermons were. It certainly wasn't the words which shook my state of apathy and sin." There always exists the possibility that God's grace, or a dormant, unconscious interest may be sparked by an occasion of boredom. Boredom can be the herald of inspiration!

2. Alpha might be a great way to connect with your youth and your parishioners. I (Norma Blinkhorn) have been in contact with Alpha Canada and listening to their webinars. There are webinars that have already taken place but you can go to <https://www.alphacanada.org/webinars> to watch them. The following webinars on the site are 1) Empowering & Developing leaders using Alpha 2) How to run an Alpha online 2) Building an effective prayer team 4) how to create a culture of invitation in your church. You can watch these webinars at anytime.

### 3. Internet and Tech sites

Shalom World, EWTN, Salt & Light, Catholic Faith National. Radio Maria

4. Easter Mission Sunday – March 19, 2020 <https://youtu.be/xzPNHuoOjwA>

5. Divine Mercy Sunday – April 19, 2020 <https://youtu.be/7IKGPeP22c>