

A View from a Window...Fr. Randy+

Today is a rather strange-feeling day as I look out the window and see nearly empty downtown St. Paul streets. Just steps away from my desk, the MN State Emergency Operations Center is buzzing with activity--with personnel representing all state agencies feverishly providing support and critical resources to the healthcare providers and public safety agencies statewide.

With the continued spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout Minnesota, the country, and the world, we have a sense of the surreal when hearing the news of the rising number of illnesses and deaths occurring due to the pandemic. There is also the never-ending onslaught of mainstream media and social media, relentlessly pounding our senses and proclaiming all manner of "facts and figures," advisories and recommendations, fanning the flames of fear and uncertainty—more problems than solutions.

We are aware of the fact that this will be a marathon event, as we respond to the tremendous needs of members of our communities and neighborhoods. It will not be a sprint. The impacts of this event will rival the greatest challenges and tests this country has addressed in our history.

The pandemic has stirred much anxiety and fear, especially because of the great amount of unknowns surrounding the nature of the virus, its transmission pathways, and how we can best protect ourselves and others from the physical and resultant psychological impacts on our hearts and minds.

Maybe we need to just take a break—*take a Holy Breath*—from all of the noise surrounding this event. Maybe in this Lenten season, we should lean into gifting ourselves a spiritual break—engaging in a brief fasting from the ever-pressing media pandemic reports.

I recently was sent the following poem written by Lynn Ungar. It has been circulating and shared widely since the beginning of the pandemic. Even if you have read it before, I invite you to close your eyes for a moment in centering prayer, then read the words of the writer.

Pandemic

by Lynn Ungar 3/11/20

"What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,

trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray.
Center down.

And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live."

May the peace of God envelop you and know you are being held in the palm of his hand. God is ever present and with us. *Amen.*