

When this whole pandemic began, I felt a sense of panic. Everything I was reading said that pastors needed to help their congregations navigate these new waters. And I was thinking “What in the world do I know about navigating these waters?! SQUAT!” (I said it more colorfully to myself but this is the PG-Church version) I have found myself in this position a LOT of times over the years of being a priest. But this has been the most challenging by far in my 41 years – and the most exhausting. Just trying to provide these videos and messages has doubled my weekly writing load. And I often think of that story about Garfunkel, who asks God: “Are the Jews really your chosen people, Lord?” And God says: “Yes, Garfunkel, the Jews are my specially chosen people.” “But Lord,” Garfunkel says, “We have suffered so much.” “Yes, because I love you very much,” God responds. “Well,” Garfunkel says, “Could you please choose somebody else?!”

I’m not saying that I’ve suffered much (I haven’t) – it’s just that I often think “Don’t you think somebody else could do this a lot better than me?” But for reasons known to God alone, you’re stuck with me at this particular moment in COVID land. And I was totally unprepared.

I have a strategy for everything in my life – and it’s the same one-note strategy for it all – pray and read, pray and read, pray and read. So as soon as this pandemic began I added an additional rosary everyday for the healing of our world from this pandemic, and I began to read everything I could find that I thought might be helpful to us, and putting them into a newly created file called ‘Covid 19.’ (I have a file for everything too!) Here is one recent addition which spoke to my heart. Perhaps it will be good for you as well.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet known as Rumi has a poem called “The Guest House.” In it, he sees life as a series of encounters with strangers: joy, anguish, meanness. And we learn from each of our ‘visitors.’ The poet urges us to “welcome and entertain them all.”

“Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.”

Be grateful for every visitor to your guest house, Rumi counsels. Turn no one away – welcome “with laughter” whatever joy or sorrow or fear comes to your door and invite them in, advises the poet, “Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.” (from THE ESSENTIAL RUMI, translated by Coleman Barks – found in CONNECTIONS, 10 May 2020)

I think Rumi’s words are deep and true – very apropos to a time of pandemic. And very difficult to live. But that seems to be the case for most that is deep and true. It’s of God – and that is always a very deep place.

But I believe that God has placed us at this particular moment of the world’s history – BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT WE COULD HANDLE IT! WITH HIM! AND THAT SOMETHING NEW COULD BE BORN FROM IT! And while I’d like to go back to my objection: “Aren’t you sure someone else should be doing this?,” I would like to come to a humble enough place to say “Ok, Lord, then tell me what you want me to do with this.”

I’m still not there.

I think we have a deep need for community to be able to walk this through – it’s too big for any of us to do alone. So let’s continue to muddle through this together. Thanks for your wonderful, faithful, prayerful

witness – and ongoing faithful concern for the poor through Western Wake, Brown Bag, BAA, HAITI GOAT, OAK CITY CARES, our collection, etc. Let us build up one another’s spirits! You build up mine! Thanks! AMEN!

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