



Dear Friends,

“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” These opening words to *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens keeps rolling through my mind like a song you can’t get out of your head. This see-saw of good and bad comes from the daily dose of COVID-19 in the news. We hear of so many of our people stepping up to the crisis following the orders of the CDC, the Governor and the Church. In addition, we hear of folks supporting our 1st responders; shopping for those who can’t get out because of physical issues; and those keeping our essential services going. We hear of encouragement both small and great — “the best of times.”

However, those same news reports tell of the hoarding of toilet paper and frozen foods, eggs, milk etc. These reports draw our attention to those who disregard the call to stay apart, who do not consider the needs of others. No wonder “the worst of times” pops into mind. Why hoard toilet paper ?? I don’t get that. Why hoard anything? Fear.

Fear fuels the worst of times; fear of getting sick, yes, but more so fear of dying. Fear of dying tops the list of things most dreaded by practically all the human race. Especially in this scientific/technological age, fear of dying provokes powerful emotions because the intense focus on this world has pushed aside our sense of life beyond our universe. Science and technology have no room for God or anything that can’t be subjected to a microscope or telescope or the scientific method. That not only narrows our focus in life, it takes away hope of life beyond the grave.

One day last I became aware that something was happening within me which I chalked up to a cold or something similar. The next day a cough, fatigue and a vague sense of a fever confronted me. I’m over 60 (way over 60) and I have medical conditions that could put me at risk. Coronavirus loomed large in my mind, which for me could mean death. Fear and faith began to wrestle within me. Did I believe what I’ve been preaching for over 40 years? Did I really believe in resurrection?

According to St. Peter we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession”. We are a people who *know* there’s more to life than what we can find at the end of a microscope or telescope. We profess that whenever we celebrate Sunday Mass. But face to face with the reality of death....fear raises it head.

“Don’t be afraid” echoes throughout the Bible like a mantra. (Look up on line “don’t be afraid” and scroll down to “List of 365 “Don’t be afraid” verses”) In the Gospels Archangel Gabriel says it to Mary; the Angel of the Lord says it to Joseph; the Angels say it to the shepherds; Jesus says it over and over: “don’t be afraid” of what God is asking of you; “don’t be afraid” of what you’re seeing and hearing; “don’t be afraid” when people turn on you for your faith; “don’t be afraid” of your son’s epilepsy; and to Jairus, after he was told his daughter was dead, “Fear is useless; only believe.” In most cases “don’t be afraid” is followed by “believe” or “trust.”

Yet, Jesus was afraid of his own death. Petrified would be a better term. He was human after all. Still, he kept faith with the Father despite his fear, “not my will but yours be done.” He obeyed even though he didn’t understand (“why have you forsaken me?”). With his last words (“into

your hands I commend my spirit”) he showed his trust. And God opened to his humanity a whole new way of life. Death ends nothing; it only leads to a new life.

Did I really believe it? Can I face my end with the trust Jesus had in the Father? The wrestling went on. A call from my doctor erased the possibility of coronavirus. Fear evaporated.

At this time in our lives fear and faith wrestle within us all. Just like it did with Jesus, fear can get the upper hand sometimes. I tasted that fear. But Jesus calls us to hold on to our trust in our loving Father. We need to keep contact with each other for support and to strengthen our faith. Please keep praying at 9, Noon, 3, 6 and 9.

We should take our cue from the father of that epileptic boy. When Jesus told him not to fear, but believe, he answered, “I believe: help my unbelief.” In this fearful time perhaps let’s make that prayer our own. I have.

Remember, we are a people of life, not of death.

God bless and keep you all,

Fr. Denis