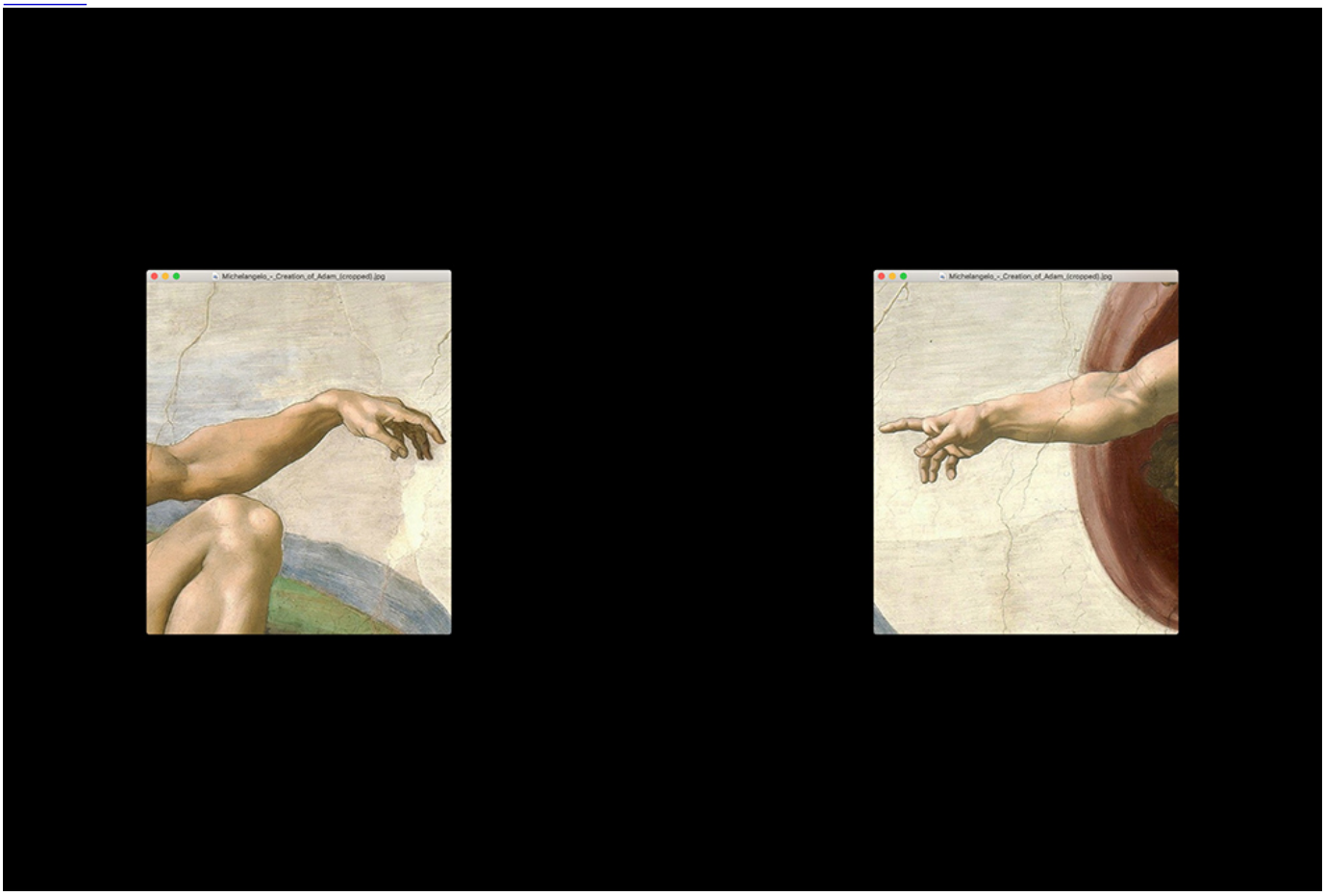
Opinion
News



Unsplash/Visuals



by Peter Daly

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

April 2, 2020

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

It's quiet.

Not much is moving around me in Washington, D.C., in this season of coronavirus.

I've dusted off my old copy of *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez.

I'm staying in my house mostly, except for long solitary walks around the streets of Capitol Hill and along the Anacostia River. The restaurants, bars, barbershops and movie theaters are closed. The hotels are deserted. Nationals Park, which should be preparing for opening day for baseball, is shuttered.

For me, the most notable thing is the closed churches. The parishes where I help out on weekends are closed. Catholic Charities, where I volunteer a couple days per week is mostly closed. (Our office of Immigration Legal Services is working from home.)

The Brothers of Charity house of hospitality for homeless men that I volunteer with is of course still operating. But poor Brother Saud has been sick. He has had to get strict with the residents. They can only go out to go to work (they work construction or security, mostly). They must wash their hands when they come in. They must sanitize the bathrooms and kitchen and keep their rooms clean. They all now have to help prepare food. (Several of them consider kitchen work to be women's work. Saud had to point out that they are a men's house. They cannot leave the cooking to him. If the men don't cook, they don't eat.)

But it is really quiet everywhere.

I am among the most privileged. Basically, I am OK.

I can stay in my little house.

The supermarket is in walking distance.

I have my pension and social security, which are just about enough to cover my basic bills.

In the last week or so I have devoted myself to household repairs and projects like hanging a light fixture and painting a closet. I've done some spring gardening. I'm going through boxes and sorting out old papers, throwing stuff away. Time to clean

out the closets.

Spiritually, I'm treating this as a long retreat.

Time to pray. Time to read. Time to journal. Time to fast. (I'm also losing weight.)

All of that is to the good.

But there are many people who are inordinately stressed out.



A priest wearing a protective mask and gloves blesses a member of his congregation after hearing confession at a Rome church while practicing social distancing March 26 during the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Remo Casilli)

I don't know what I would be doing if I was in a two-bedroom apartment with a couple of little kids who were going crazy. What would I do if I was a laid off hourly worker who was running out of money? How would I cope if my business was going under or if I had to let people go? What would I be saying to my family if there was no money to buy food or put gas in the car?

Thankfully our mayor in D.C. and the governor in Maryland have been showing good leadership. They have selectively closed things, but essential services are still operating. They have put the emphasis on health but have also made it possible for some things to continue.

What is it that the church can offer now in this time of isolation?

Spiritual wisdom. We can focus on the things that matter, like love and community.

We can give people consolation and peace in their anxiety, and even as they approach death.

We can remember that our view of the future does not stop at the horizon of death, but looks beyond, into the next life.

We can offer prayer.

Many churches are putting services online.

Many parishes have organized telephone trees and virtual communities.

I'm reaching out to people by phone, not just texting and email. We need to hear a human voice.

Religion is about community. It comes from the same root as "ligament," the thing that binds us together. Maybe that is what the church can offer now, even as we are confined to our houses.

We are joined to each other. All of us.

But for now, it is quiet.

[Fr. Peter Daly is a retired priest of the Washington Archdiocese and a lawyer. After 31 years of parish service, he now works with Catholic Charities.]

Editor's note: *We can send you an email alert every time Fr. Peter Daly's column, Priestly Diary (formerly called Parish Diary), is posted. Go to this page to sign up: Email alert sign-up.*

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Coronavirus** feature series. View the full series.