News
Spirituality



by NCR Staff

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Weeks into the coronavirus pandemic and with no real end in sight, NCR is committed to bringing our readers comprehensive coverage of the crisis. Following are letters to the editor written by NCR readers in response to NCR's coronavirus articles. Letters have been edited for length and clarity. You can join the conversation by following the steps below.

"Alas, none of these thoughts sound very spiritual," writes Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese in his column "When a priest and housemate falls ill, the practical becomes spiritual."

How "un-Jesuitical" are the title and the quote. The "contemplative in action" is not conscious of the redeemed spirituality of every breath, every action but the acknowledgment underpins it all. The orientation to empathy; compassion acted upon; the joy in creation; the acknowledgment and questioning of pain and of evil, these are just some of the human characteristics that are "in the image and likeness." They are not only spiritual but somehow religious.

Who more than a formed Ignatian should be aware and share? Whether or not they are (sectarian) religious, they are human, the expression of the creator, impregnated with the incarnation whether we are conscious of them or not. I don't fault Reese for the pragmatism of his column however, please follow it up with an Irenaeus-like reprise that acknowledges that every human act is as spiritual as it is physical, every act of human kindness, compassion, empathy and care is impregnated with the act of the redeemer, evoking the "smile" of the creator, whether we are conscious of it, whether we are Catholic, Christian, Muslim or Jew.

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia



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Thank you, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese for your article "Meditating on death during a pandemic," it brought me to tears as I slowly read each line.

It was so moving that it inspired me to share it with my two daughters who live in Miami, while I am here in New York.

Your words quickly placed things into perspective and what is really meaningful.

The pandemic certainly is a humbling experience. It seems to be a non-discriminatory equalizer where age, gender or social economic status has no consideration.

Your story highlights the fragility of life.

Thank you for sharing your talents!

MARIA LUNA

Brooklyn, New York

***

Yes as Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese says when thinking/meditating on death, remember what matters. Beautiful words you have written. Like I have said to our kids, "Why me Lord? What did I do to have you people in my life? What gifts you are. How lucky I am." Simple, corny maybe, but who cares. It is true.

DAN NEWELL

Palm Desert, California

***

I met Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese during Fr. Paul Cioffi's liturgies at Georgetown University. Cioffi's death was also a lonely one at Washington's Medical Center due to his sudden illness.

This brings me to the point: emotionally, surely it is very comforting to have family and friends present, but being mentally prepared would give me courage to meet our maker. And if I am, would it not stand to reason that I would be relieved to shake off the accumulated dust of my life and rejoice at finally entering our eternal home?

CLARA M. GRAFF

Sarasota, Florida

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I read the banner, "As Catholics hunker down, Latino base communities provide a church alternative," in your email earlier today. It brought a smile.

It seems to me that the true meaning of our faith is best expressed in small groups that gather to fellowship, teach, pray, understand, care for one another and break bread. How many were in the upper room?

It was only after Constantine in 325 AD that the church transitioned from a church of the poor to a church of the elites. Thus, a new church alternative was established.

HANK HOHENSTEIN

Shady Cove, Oregon

***

I write as a former believer and former priest who worked in Latin America for three years.

Small groups would seem to me to be preferable for many reasons to the long-accepted monster gatherings in churches. At the present time, the virus would find it more difficult to spread within them.

But more generally, did Jesus not say to worship at home, not in the temple? Why did Christians move away from this advice?

The reason may have been that the church became institutionalized and commercialized. Control was important. It was easy to preach to a captive audience. It was easier to collect funds. For the congregation there was the added benefit of communal social contact. This latter will be sorely missed in any future changed paradigm.

JUSTIN MORAHAN

Dublin, Ireland

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In regards to "If you can't go to confession, take your sorrow directly to God, pope says," my father was a chaplain's assistant during World War II. He and the chaplain had a sign they would hang on the door whenever they left the ship:

> Roses are red.
>
> Violets are blue.
>
> This little chit is to let you know we feel sorry for you.
>
> Tell your troubles to Jesus. The chaplain's gone ashore.

We will prevail for we have already endured far worse.

RICHARD STADTHERR

Park City, Kansas

Advertisement

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Please, as a Catholic magazine, you do a disservice to Christian Catholics in this country and possibly to others that read your misguided and purposefully slanted article, "One small step for economic recovery, avoiding one giant leap toward Putinism."

It only brings forth distrust about our president and those that are truly trying to help those in need.

Instead of unifying your readers in faith and the love of God's mercy you instill division, lies and half-truths to put forward your petty politics and unchristian thoughts and discord — all above your "presumed mission" of propagating our Lord's and our Catholic Church's beautiful message of faith, hope and charity!

MARCOS SAIZDELAMORA

Miami, Florida

***

Once again, Michael Sean Winters is right on target when, in an erudite and thoroughly researched way, he warns us of the dangers of what might possibly lie ahead if decent people let their guard down. His recounting of history from the Crusades, through World War I, up to the present Trumpian era, shows the dangerously negative power of "polarization, deadlock, mass mobilization against internal and external enemies, and complicity by existing elites."

How correct Winters' assessment of the last four years is, and his closing statement, especially with November elections looming, should get all of us to recognize that "these are dangerous times and it behooves all of us to pay [close] attention."

(Fr.) CHRISTOPHER SENK

Fort Myers, Florida

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"What do we learn from this place where we don't want to be?" is a good piece. Although it is wishful thinking that things will change once we are out of this predicament. What will not change is the greed that runs this country. The rich will never give up what they have. Many things change in this world, human nature is not one of them.

DARYL JACKSON

Pelham, New York

***

I am so heartened to read "Dr. Anthony Fauci, dedicated to public service, formed at Jesuit high school." As a delayed vocation (to higher education, not to a religious order), I was required to either take physical education or a first aid class. I took the first aid class in the spring of 1988 in the evenings, once per week as the community college was not within easy driving distance for the degree in which I was enrolled.

We could choose the subject for our research paper and my choice was the HIV/AIDS crisis. I thought my being informed would not only be good for me, but I could also help educate others.

Much of my research was physically done in the health sciences library at SUNY Buffalo State College and I became well acquainted with Dr. Anthony Fauci and his work, as well as all the rest of the current research and the activity and actions by LGBT groups. After hours and hours of research, my long term employment goal was to work in a similar place — the academic library.

In the next chunk of education, a required sociology class had two main foci, one being AIDS. Seven years later, I commenced studies for a masters in library science and the dream to work in an academic library came true.

Thank you, Peter Feuerherd, and thank you, Fauci, for being the voice of reason.

JUDY SCHWARTZ

Hamburg, New York

***

I was very moved by Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan's article, "For the love of God (literally), stay home, be safe and pray" and grateful to him for articulating so thoughtfully the position we find ourselves in at this moment in history.

The other prevailing emotion as I read the article was sadness. In his article, he mentioned feeling solidarity with those who's normal is no access to the sacraments, like those in the Amazon basin. As I read that, a litany of the excluded began in my heart — all those in remote regions and communities, those who have been divorced, our LGBQT community, those who support full ministry of women (including but not restricted to ordination) in the church, the homeless, the hurt. I agree that this is an opportunity to become more aware of all who are excluded, to feel their pain and to ponder how we might move forward to welcome them back into full community and hope they have not given up on us as we have on them.

I am also grateful for Horan pointing out that God is not restricted to our places of worship and his reflection that God is here for us so that we might be here for each other.

KATHERINE CAMERON

Regina, Saskatchewan

***

I applaud the ideas that Heidi Schlumpf presented in her article, "Religious education in a time of coronavirus." However, she admits her background in religious education. I also have a background in religious education, but I think about all those parents who have been denied the chance to embrace their faith for themselves. How about some books for them? They would renew their own spiritually and could pass it on to their children. My own spirituality started with my father's living his. This is the best way to teach your children.

By the way, I hate the term "religious education." How about "spiritual growth" instead?

FRANCIE ORTHMEYER

Columbus, Ohio

***

I so appreciated Rebecca Collins Jordan's reflection on our homes as cloisters. She referred to St. Benedict's commitment to place for a monastic way of living. She bemoaned that she wasn't praying as much as she thought she would during the stay-at-home order. I remember those same concerns when I was a young woman. From my current perspective as a 71-year-old woman however, I offer the prayer of Thomas Merton.

Your commitment to community of family, friends and students, staying home to avoid adding to the sickness and death around us, your call to educate your students from a distance, claiming your walk into nature ... all salted with your desire to know and be in God. This old gal says you are praying.

Thank you for your witness to the desire for God that will only be satisfied after our transitions to the other side. Remember, if all Benedictines did was take time away to pray, there'd be a lot of burned bread and probably no Benedictine cheese.

MARIE SWEENEY

Columbus, Ohio

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We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.

Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.

Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.

If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.

Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.

We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your submission will receive careful consideration.

Published letters may be edited for length and style.

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