

The San Antonian

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Reflections on Pandemic Spring 2020

By MaryAnn Bressler

When I start reflecting on the situation in which we find ourselves— dealing with a horrific disease, confined to home, facing a financial meltdown, realizing the truly devastating disparities that will make this time far more calamitous for some people than others—I have so many thoughts that I could probably write a book. I have been considering not just my own life but those of so many others—my friends in the retirement communities with whom I am unable to share Communion, my cousin whose husband has been on a ventilator for over a week at the time I write this*, all of the people in the professions that require them to put their health on the line to serve others, the people who lack health care, and so many others. There is so much to ponder and pray over.

Early on in this period of isolation, I realized that there are many rooms in my mind and I was visiting all of them at breakneck pace. The room where fear lives, where anger, where anxiety, where loneliness. Those rooms are dimly lit and very cold. Sometimes when I enter those rooms, the door sticks and it takes me some effort to get out. I try to learn something when I get stuck in those spaces, I try to listen for the voice of the Spirit leading me out. I try to discern what those rooms have to teach me about my calling at this particular moment in time. I also find the rooms that offer hope, gratitude, joy, serenity. In those rooms, I feel deeply the presence of God. And in those spaces too, I learn and grow.

Continuing to work during this time provides me the opportunity to get outside of my head, to have a sense of purpose. I am grateful to walk to the office every day, knowing that I am extremely fortunate to still have a job. I hope and pray that the work I am doing will help to support our community and our mission during this time of separation.

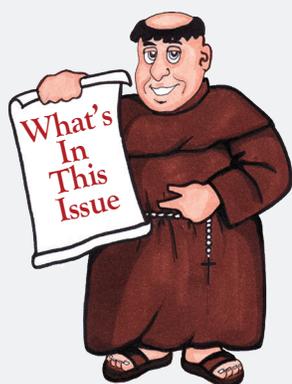
As we begin to think about moving past stay-at-home orders, life is and will continue to be irrevocably different and so we will all have to begin to adapt to a new normal. Because this radical change began during Lent and continues through the Easter season we are offered the opportunity to consider how God is leading us to new life through the midst of pain and suffering, and that new life in Jesus is often unexpected and surprising. I pray that all people of the world will seek to be bearers of life and that we will emerge from this pandemic with a heightened awareness of the work that must be done to better love God and our neighbors.

*He came home in early May!

Becoming Alive

By Fr. Jamie Weber

I think what I am learning is all the ways we connect with others. From the grocery store, restaurants, hardware store, maybe the people we see working out, pray with, see at the parishes and all the places we frequent a lot. I'm lucky to have close friends and family that I see often because I want to be with them. I was struck the other day by the banner outside ACE Hardware: Essential and Helpful. It is funny how essential human presence is. I didn't realize how much I enjoyed just going to the hardware store, and having my hardware problem solved. While I have in some ways embraced this time of seclusion, by reading more and spending more time in my cabin, I came to realize that I felt like I was dying inside because of the lack of connectedness with others. It was a real warning to me of the socialization I need. I am happy Msgr. moved in, as well as that I have Fr. Jacob and the three seminarians that have been furloughed. They allow my circle to be more than one and are a constant reminder of how life is broadened by our socializing. Though it has been different having someone here all the time besides Ripley, it has been a blessing because this "stay" would have been a lot harder on me emotionally and spiritually. And understanding that makes my heart go out to people who have been alone without any socialization or connectedness from a human being, even before the virus. While we have to have our social distance from each other, I have realized that even though this may get me down, I ultimately become resurrected when I connect myself with God and others; I then become Alive.



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Memories Bring Insight

By Deanna Spatz

These stay-at-home weeks offered the chance for me to work on a particular project that took hours and hours of uninterrupted time. Fred's March birthday was a big one, and to celebrate I put together a video, including clips of our grandkids interviewing him and lots of old photos. To add to that, I made a digital album of some of the trips we've made over the years. This took perusing through our whole stash of digitized photos of family members and friends. It was a real sentimental journey as I looked back at these treasured moments, both special and ordinary, of our lives. It also showed so dramatically what a privileged life we have enjoyed. Our story in pictures stands in stark contrast to scenes on the evening news – long lines awaiting a bag of food, miles of tents sheltering refugees, homeless camps on sidewalks and under bridges. It made clear again the terrible responsibility we privileged have to the hungry, homeless, asylees, refugees, the world's millions who live in extreme poverty, the billions who have no access to doctors or medicine. These are the wounds of Christ in today's world. Tending these wounds, in solidarity and with compassion, is the very mission of the Church. It is as simple, and challenging, as that. And it is our privilege to do so.

Covid in the Springtime

By Winnie Brubach

As I was thinking about Mary Anne's request for the San Antonian, I added up how long we have been in quarantine. Six weeks is very long time! One of the ways I've spent my time is watching the weather. I tried to do outside things when the weather was good for that and inside things when it was best to stay inside. We've had some cold; some warm and even a little hot! There's been snow and hail, lots of rain, wind and the occasional warm and sunny day! Have you noticed the moon and stars at night?

I garden. There is a lot to do before mid-May. So the tomatoes and peppers are now about 4 inches high under their lights in our little greenhouse. The rain and sun has been good for the peas and spinach outside. The garlic is gorgeous!

Then there is the woods behind my house with everyone who lives there: three raccoons, so far. A herd of four does. The buck has moved on. There are a bazillion squirrels, at least that's how it seems. I feed the birds and so far in April I've had 29 species visit my back yard or fly over. Robins and Carolina wrens have nests where I can see them and watch for the babies to hatch. To these creatures I add my cat LuLou and our foster dogs Sassy and Piper. Life has not been dull!

I've watched the trees begin to change from winter barren to spring green. There are many shades of spring green. Each tree has its own schedule and seems to

be moving as slowly as the rest of us. Or maybe, I've just paid more attention this year.

For a long time I have known I don't need to choose a "penance" for Lent. One always presents itself; I just have to go with it. The Covid-19 pandemic turned out to be this year's challenge for Lent. The reflections on life and the loss of it have created in me a sorrow for all those who have had a loved one die. The Triduum is my favorite feast of the year. Thursday's meal was held in my living room, with Sassy and Piper huddling close, just in case. Friday's death wasn't difficult to contemplate; it was everywhere. Saturday night, an hour after sun down, I lit my own fire, sang my own tunes, read the readings of the night. I spent Sunday with the Bishop and ministers from St Patrick's in NYC.

I've tried the virtual Mass via internet on Sunday, but couldn't get comfortable there. Have been so grateful to Mary Anne and Michelle for the Zoom prayer services! The difference between the Mass and the prayer services is the faces of St. Anthony's present at the latter. I miss you all a lot! NCR has a new feature, an emailed homily on the Sunday readings. The homily comes on Saturday, so it's there as a companion for the readings of the Sunday. It's a good meditation.

I'm an introvert so all this alone time hasn't bothered me so much. But some days when I get cabin fever, I take a drive or go for a walk. Once I see the world is still there, I calm down and return home. I haven't used a full tank of gas yet in 6 weeks! I have my mask, an N95! It was

given to me by a friend. I've gone off to Kroger with it in search of TP and the rest of my list. Found most everything but not the ever elusive TP. I've emailed and called friends to ask if they were Covid-19 free. So far they have been. It was good to connect with some of them because it had been awhile. I received and shared the cartoons going around with the themes of quarantine, lack of TP, sewing masks. At Easter I got photos of hardboiled Easter eggs with masks and green peeps with masks!

Life is beginning to "open up" so I'm looking at what all this has to say about the future. Where has God called me to in this pandemic event? "They" say Covid-19 is going to remain with us until the scientists can figure out an inoculation against it. We don't talk about this much anymore but do you remember polio? It is a virus, too. I remember as a kid we had to take a nap every day in the summer so we wouldn't get polio, and then all the talk about Salk and Sabin coming out with their inoculations. Now polio is almost gone from our planet.

The way of life learned with this virus will be maintained for a long time: wear your mask, wash your hands, often, don't touch your face, have an intimate conversation at 6 paces. Don't hug, don't kiss, don't shake hands, and don't get into large groups. If you feel sick, stay home! To these I add, remember the gifts of the quiet time and don't lose them, keep using them.

I'll be oh so happy to sing in the choir and pray with the parish again, in person!

What I Learned During the Pandemic

By Msgr. Lane

When the possibility of quarantines first surfaced, Father Jamie and I discussed the advantages of me temporarily moving into St. Cecilia Rectory where I could continue to help with the sacramental life of the region. I couldn't have kept going in and out of the rectory or church while coming in from a multi-unit housing situation without the danger of carrying the virus into either place. So in March I moved into St. Cecilia Rectory.

Father Jamie has been more than hospitable and I hope I haven't interfered with his life too much. If I have, he doesn't show it. I discovered that even though I have lived alone for several years, communal living is still a great option. I've been able to participate in the live streaming liturgical life of the region, the provisions for the sacrament of reconciliation and the sacrament for the dying. Without being here, I could not have done that. So his openness to me being here is a great gift to me and my life as a priest. For me, priestly fraternity now has a deeper meaning.

Additionally, I have developed a friendship with Ripley although she questions that often when I don't share my meals with her. It's difficult to have a friend cry and whine when you won't give her your dinner. She challenges me with sad eyes, barking and crying to be more thoughtful, so we have come to the compromise – I will give her some of my dinner and that seems to work – for awhile anyway. The problem is Fr. Jamie now has to take

her out to the country to run and lose all the extra pounds. It has crossed my mind that maybe I should join them!

I have also come to a renewed awareness of one of the roles the priest plays in the Church. The Church has always taught that the priest served in the role of mediator between God and His people. In the Mass, standing in the active role of the operative person (in Persona Christi) of the sacrifice of the Son to the Father, the apostles were sent to bring all believers into the presence of Jesus' sacrificial event throughout the ages. The priesthood was established by Jesus to continue giving that gift to his people. The whole community becomes present to and participates in that saving event, as the Hebrews became present to and participated in the Exodus in the Passover meal, through the liturgical action of the priest. When the community is present, we have the real sense of sharing in that presence. We realize now that what God's People cannot do in our present situation, the priest can still do for them. It helps to understand the sacrament of orders a little more clearly. It also makes the desire for our reunion in the liturgy more intense. Oftentimes we do not appreciate enough that which has never been taken away from us. Through the centuries many of our fellow Catholics have experienced this depravation but for, most of us, this is the first time. Maybe it can make us appreciate the ordained priesthood more and also the liturgical nature of our community more.

So, all in all, there is never an evil that cannot bring forth some good. I hope that this virus crisis can bring us closer together in the mystery of the Church and in her saving liturgical and sacramental life. Then we can be grateful that no life experience is ever really wasted and the Lord is truly with us and among us.

A Time to Remember

By Alice Maher

Sequestered days have their own blessings and can open doors that have been long closed. It was on just such a day that I began to wonder "just what is in those boxes at the back of the closet in the basement"? This was followed by "if not today, then when"? I found there a box that had travelled with me for many years and many moves. It was labeled "Alice's memorabilia". After several days, I had separated out stacks of letters from my mother, father, sister, grandmother, late husband and his family, the children, and their children, a friend from India, Tom, and numerous friends from over the years. Most fascinating were letters from Laura, a college friend and someone I had lived with for two years after college. Then I moved on to Chicago and it was at that time that we began to write each other. She had been an English major and then taught in high school. She wrote very well, and often at length! I thought I would read through them and then send them off to her. As I read I increasingly wanted to share these memories with her. So we began having Friday morning "readings" by phone. Each week we would read one letter. There were 17 letters from September 1963 to June 1975.

We laugh, we digress, we marvel at our young selves, our certainty, our ability to enter into new and different situations, our "intrepititude" (Laura's word).

A little about Laura. She was raised in northern Alabama. While getting her masters at Vanderbilt, she met and later married Ahmad, who was from Beirut. After many moves, they are now living in Toronto, so I get to see her when we visit our son there. Her husband now has stage 4 cancer and they have been living a pretty sequestered life before we all began living that way.

So now we are three letters in, and last week we spent a lot of time talking about her first visit to Beirut. She talked about Ahmad's extended family, the loveliness of the country, its sophistication, and the hospitality of its people (this was pre-war).

This Friday time has become a highlight of our weeks. I haven't read ahead so it is always a delight, seeing where we are in our past life. What a wonderful time it has been to share long-forgotten experiences and to see how they have woven through our lives and shaped the people we have become.

It takes a "quiet time" to open the box in the closet and savor it.

Two Rolls of Toilet Paper – Learning a Humbling Experience

By Kathy Ryan

I have worked with a group of wonderful volunteer women who have been teaching the women at the Anna Louise Inn (a residence for formerly homeless women) how to sew. In March (before the lockdown) Gilda, one of the ladies from ALI, called to ask for some help in getting food. She was also out of toilet paper. I knew before even before taking her to the store that there would be no toilet paper in stock. I went to my cupboard. I had six rolls. Hmmm. I have been fortunate to be able to donate to causes in the past. But those donations really didn't impact my own little world. If I gave her some of MY toilet paper, what would happen if I ran out? Wow. Then it hit me that giving her my precious toilet paper might mean actually giving something that was going to impact ME. I think the Lord was shaking his head and smiling at me. "Really, you are worried about YOUR toilet paper?"

How humbling. How real to me. Such a small thing and such a big lesson. And what a loving lesson the Lord sent to me!

God At Work

By Fr. Jacob Willig

It's funny how the Lord can even use a time like this.

It is amazing how there are different seasons to life. I am continually amazed, when I look back over my short thirty-some odd years in the ways that God has blessed me. Especially in difficult times, I think it is good to ask ourselves what we are thankful for, or try to see the ways God is working. For we do believe that God works all things for the Good of those who love Him. Sometimes this is not easy to believe though, in the midst of difficult times. It's funny how the Lord can use even a time like this.

As schools began to close due to the pandemic, the seminary, also sent their students to parishes to do some distance learning. I have been blessed by three seminarians, sent home from seminary and we have a small Oratory of sorts here at St. Margaret-St. John. One day when I was in the chapel praying I realized that this is really a dream come true for me. Since I moved onto the parish grounds of the patron of parish priests, (St. John Vianney), I have desired to have a small house of men that can pray together, share a common life, and challenge each other in holiness in preparation for the priesthood. It is funny how the Lord can use even a time like this.

It can be difficult to be isolated at times and not see our community. It was very odd to have Easter Sunday Mass on my own without our parish family there. We are meant to be united. A priest is meant for his people. However, the Lord began to teach me something in this time too. Celebrating Easter Mass on my own, was a rude awakening that I was made firstly for God. In a new way, I realized that I was speaking directly to God in my prayers at that Mass. There was no one else there and I was worshipping Him! To someone reading this it may seem obvious, that this happens at each Mass, but it was a wake-up that I needed at that moment. I was firstly made to know, love, and serve God. Secondly, I was made to love my neighbor. Being a young priest it is so easy to fall into a hyper-activism, and have that service aspect take over everything. Service is good, but without God at the center, I am totally failing. Realizing that God is my loving Father, who created me, who loves me, and who I am called to worship before anything else is so refreshing. He is the one who loves us and then sends us out to share His love with others. I thank God for these gifts He has been revealing to me during this time. It is funny how the Lord can use even a time like this.

1 John 4:7-9

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

A Quarantine List

By Jane Wittke

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, I thought I was usually attentive to detail and somewhat mindful in the moment. I was wrong on both counts.

When staying at home became the norm, I discovered that time stretched out almost like a movie in slow motion. My first inclination was to write down a list of tasks, of which few got done. Instead I soon found myself making mental notes about things around me that I was noticing for the first time or the first time in a long time.

Things like the confusion of tulips and daffodils on our street trying to bloom, only to be stopped by near-freezing temperatures, and then overnight declaring themselves in bursts of color. The intense lavender scent of some manicure oil that a friend had given me in the depths of winter, now even more of a treat in a period of endless hand washing. My neighbor's puppy's excited yipping when he discovered that he could roll down the long hill in his backyard—and then do it over and over again. A letter of condolence kept from last year, uncanny in its depth of empathy and the timing with which it arrived.

I could go on and on, but never catch up with the list because it grows almost minute by minute. Its significance is not in the mental notes themselves, of course, but in the profound sense of gratitude that comes with them. I hope to keep both when the pandemic is over.

Krumm COVID 19 Quarantine

By Christina Martich/Joe Krumm

Our family has felt rather lucky and blessed during this stay-at-home time. Even though we kept following the news about the virus in China since January, we were still rather surprised how the quarantine started so suddenly for us all. Our family has tried to make this time positive and productive with a schedule to help the kids, yet also a time to explore activities we rarely seem able to fit into our lives. Amidst these global concerns which have affected so many physically, financially, and psychologically, our family feels very fortunate to be together and have each other.

We feel so blessed to be grounded with our family and faith friends in Christ. Reconnecting in new ways through Zoom has been a whole new experience. However, it just does not compare with actually gathering at Mass and sharing the same worship space. Even though all in our home are busy with remote teaching and learning every day, there still is a little more time to make that new recipe we have been wanting to try, to build a puzzle, play basketball, or catch. Our girls have been busy not only with school work but also with online classes for instruments, ballet, and gymnastics. It is amazing to see how much they really can continue to do remotely! Yet we realize how much more meaningful it would be if we could do these activities physically together sharing the same learning space. Our girls have also amazed us with their cleaning and organizing! They even found a Netflix program about organizing and just ran with the ideas!

We also have a new addition to our family! March 15th we adopted Figaro, a four-year-old cat! He is so sweet, a gentle giant Maine coon. He is reminding us every day how to just chill out, relax, and take things one moment at a time. Savor the slow life!...what therapy for us all!

Another big blessing...spring! We can go out for walks in the neighborhood and work in the garden! How reinvigorating the sun feels!

But do we feel a little strange for all that we have?.... We try to remember to lift up in prayer the sick, the unemployed, the health care workers, the stranded migrant workers, those in prison, the elderly, the lonely, the graduating seniors, the list goes on, does it not?

Lord, help us show more care and concern. Help us continue to explore tangible ways we can help now and in the future. We ask that we may emerge from this quarantine with more compassion and stronger in our faith and love for all creation.

Living in Transition

By Kathy Winters

Early in this pandemic, my husband and I joked that it was the extroverts who struggled with the stay-at-home order. We introverts were doing just fine, and we even relished the uninterrupted time to settle into our new home after our recent downsizing move. This isn't to say I wasn't struggling at times—I often felt great anxiety over the prospect of myself or a loved one contracting the virus, and feared that any ache or pain I felt was surely "it".

While we have endured some losses, overall this time has allowed me more of many things. More prayer, yoga, meditation, and journaling (all of which help to ease my worried mind). More neighborhood walks, enjoying beautiful blue skies as we explore our new locale. More notice of creation unfolding around us in the bloom of a new spring. More cooking and healthful eating at home, and even "upping" my baking game (yeast no longer intimidates me!). More connection with our grown sons who both live at a distance, thanks to modern technology. I even set up a Facebook group for my large extended family and have heard from cousins that I have not seen in years and their children and grandchildren I have never met. For the most part, I have moved about my life with ease these last six weeks and found so many blessings that were within my grasp all along if I had only slowed down enough to notice.

I could stop here and just give thanks for this wonderful blessed life of mine and pride myself for being so productive while following the governor's orders. But I believe that God calls me to more—to consider those for whom this pandemic has meant much greater losses. Those who have lost loved ones and must bear their grief in this exaggerated solitude. Those for whom staying at home means losing a job or a beloved small business and the ability to support their family. Those oft-forgotten brothers and sisters on the margins of society whose suffering from poverty, violence, and hunger have been amplified. I worry greatly about how this has derailed the young college student I mentor, just after it seemed she was back on track.

Borrowing a bit from Richard Rohr, OFM, I pray that we not become imprisoned within ourselves. As we nurture our interior lives, may we work even harder to narrow the chasm of injustice in our larger community. Yes, staying home has its challenges, but as followers of Jesus there is much more work to be done. What is ours to do?

“How Come History Takes Such a Long, Long Time?” *(from Bruce Cockburn’s song, “Waiting for a Miracle”)*

By Jody Coaston

I’m a book-oriented person who loves historical mysteries. So when all this began I found myself wanting to “cheat” and turn to the last chapter to find out what finally happens. Or at least I wanted to feel the thickness of the pages between my right thumb and forefinger and see how much longer the story is going to be. I haven’t figured how to do either one. But I was struck with astonishment when I suddenly realized something I suppose I’d always known intellectually and never truly understood. People living through historical events and eras, which is what we’re doing now, NEVER know what will happen. Or when. In the early ‘40s, we didn’t know the Nazis wouldn’t win the war. In the 1860s, we didn’t know the country wouldn’t be permanently split in two. In the 1770s, we didn’t know that the United States would really leave the British Empire. We didn’t know polio would not always menace our children. We didn’t know the 1918 flu epidemic would ever end. Or the Black Plague. Or any of the other periods of suffering in human history. Or the ones before recorded history that we know nothing about. I pray daily, not only for health and safety, but for wisdom, patience, and courage. Perhaps the worst part of our pain and stress is the uncertainty, the not knowing. It’s easier to be brave when we know exactly what the danger is and what it isn’t, and, most of all, when it will be over so we can breathe a sigh of relief and STOP being brave. But we don’t. We have to be brave anyway. And we always have. It’s part of being human.

Learning from the Pandemic

By Dave Scharfenberger

We are living through a pandemic that has affected our lives like nothing else we have experienced in our lifetime. For myself, I am used to getting out going to meetings, visiting with friends and going about doing the social activities I care about. I never expected celebrating Holy Week and Easter in my house watching the Mass on TV absent my friends and members of my St. Anthony community. I and another faculty member at Mount St. Joseph have had to communicate with our students online rather than having discussions in person. Certainly the lack of face-to-face communication is the biggest aspect of my life that I miss. I have had to find meaning through reading, listening to music, and taking walks. My human contact is limited to my wife and daughter, although we have gone on walks with

my son’s family keeping a social distance especially from my grandchildren.

However, the changes of this past month have brought insights. With the dramatic change in my lifestyle, I am reminded that as much as I would like, I really am not in complete control. During Holy Week especially, I was reminded that I need to lay more concerns/needs in God’s hands. I am grateful for family, friends and the beauty of God’s creation. My walks have enabled me to see all the growth coming up this spring and appreciate God’s creation. I am also reminded of the joys and pains and suffering in the world. The sickness caused by the coronavirus, the efforts by our medical personnel, and the suffering caused by injustice and racism have become more evident during this crisis.

We all are living through an extraordinary time of sickness, suffering and sacrifice. I doubt that we will ever be the same.

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