

May 14, 2020

Dear Apostles Friends,

These are momentous times, and I've noticed that a lot of people are taking the time to document their pandemic lives in video blogs, social media, and YouTube. The Church of the Apostles Thursday message is an unusual place to document one's pandemic experience, but I'm going to give it a try anyway. I think my experience is far from unique, and I hope to hit some universal themes. If I fail, I hope you'll bear with me and, if nothing else, enjoy the cat photos.

My week runs from Thursday to Wednesday and culminates in the submission of this message.

Thursday

Lord, I have an idea for next week's message. I don't know if it's a good idea, but it's something I feel compelled to try. There are scenes I experience, images that burn their way into my brain, that I think are emblematic of my pandemic experience. I'd like to show these images and try to tie them together around universal themes that others may be experiencing, too. Well, that's the plan, anyway. If this seems like a good idea, any help you care to provide would be appreciated. Thank you. Amen.

Friday.

We splurge on Fridays by getting take out from our favorite restaurant, a local family-run seafood and crab house. Danielle (pictured) and her mom run the place, but Danielle's sister and brothers help out sometimes. We've met many other of their family and friends, and their pastor even stops by occasionally. The family sustained an enormous loss when Danielle's father died unexpectedly in 2013. The family pulled together, their friends and customers rallied around them, and they made it through that tragedy. Now they (and we) are confronting another tragedy with the only weapons in our arsenal, love and hard work. But they are one and the same, aren't they?

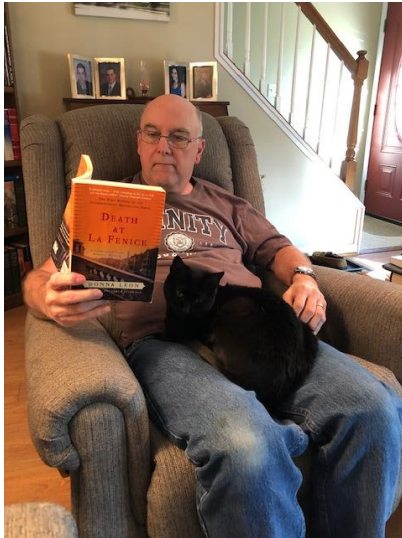


Thank you, Lord, for examples that show us the power of resilience, persistence, and effort, guided by love. Help us to draw lessons from these examples and use them in our own struggles. Bless this family, dear God, the food they prepare and the lessons they teach. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Saturday

My Corona Life seems small to me sometimes. I push back against its ever-shrinking boundaries by reading books and watching television programs set in far-away places. I binge watch travel shows. I'm living proof that you crave most what you can't have. I love anything that helps me understand that the world is bigger than it seems right now.

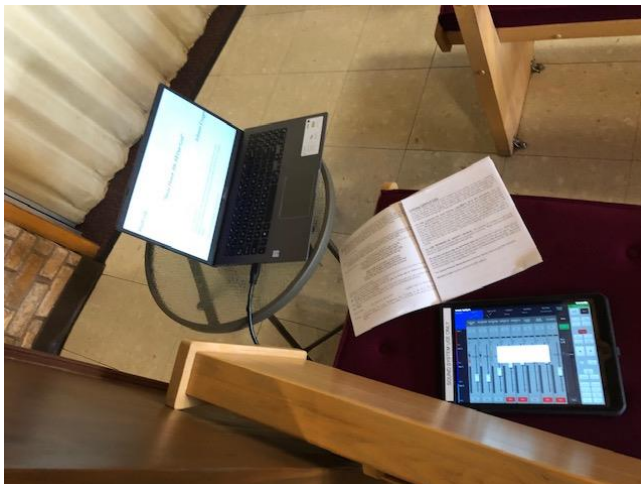
I love mysteries, too. Harper and I are helping Commissario Brunetti of the Venice Police Force find out who killed the maestro at La Fenice Opera House. I suspect the soprano. Harper says the dog did it. (She always says that.)



Venice seems so exotic, so different from my pandemic world, but then I remember that Italy has been hit particularly hard by this virus. Maybe it's not so different after all. Is there a Venice me who drives his boat to the Rialto market to get necessities, only to find no *carta igienica* (toilet paper) on the shelves? Is espresso machine repair an essential service? Does he long to get out and see the magnificent sights in his beautiful city? Not the opera house, though. Too dangerous.

Lord, help me understand that the world can seem both big and small at the same time. Thank you for quiet evenings, good mysteries, and four-legged family to curl up and enjoy them with. Amen.

Sunday



I'm running the A/V system for the virtual service we share with Trinity. I think this will continue, even after we resume "new normal" on-site services.

Monday

The cat in the bag goes through the window. It's not Dr. Seuss. It's veterinary care in a pandemic. Fritzee is 16, pretty old for a cat, and she has advanced kidney disease. We take her to the vet to get fluids twice a week, and she's doing all right. She's still pretty spunky for an old girl. We use a cat bag instead of a crate because it's less stressful for her. We used to go in and comfort her during the procedure. Now we hand her through the window, and when she's finished they hand her back. The techs love our old girl. Heather is pictured here. They call her "Fritters." We all know that this fluid therapy won't fix the underlying kidney issues, but we're thankful for the extra time it has given her. One day we will hand her through the window, and she won't come back. It is understood that Heather and her colleagues will stand in for us when the time comes. They'll hold her and let her know she is loved, and we will know she wasn't alone.



Lord, one of the cruelest aspects of this pandemic is the sense of isolation all of us feel to some degree. Those who are in hospitals and nursing homes, unable to be comforted by family and friends, feel it most acutely. Thank you for stand-ins, Lord. They are truly doing your work during this pandemic. Bless them, protect them, and strengthen them for the work that lies ahead. Amen.



We are FaceTiming with our daughter, Emily, and her fiancé, Justin. They have jobs that allow them to work from home most of the time. Em says she only goes in to the office one day per week. Our sons all have essential jobs. Our oldest, Joe, is a health care worker. He's working crazy hours right now. He's tired but ok. We're thankful they're all healthy, and we're thankful they can still work when so many people can't. We're proud of them and afraid for them at the same time.

Tuesday. WARNING: There is a Dad Joke in this section.

Laurie and I, like many others, are spending some of our stay-at-home time learning. We're taking a course entitled "How To Listen To and Understand Great Music." I've always loved listening to classical



music, but I don't know the first thing about it. I can't tell a sonata from a concerto, and I couldn't pick the great composers out of a lineup. Of course, you'd never get all the great composers in a lineup because one would always be Haydn. (You were warned.) There is one thing I wish they would have told us before we started this course. I wish they would have told us it was going to be hard. Apparently, one has to have a solid grounding in music theory before one can truly appreciate great music. Who knew? Oh well. We're into it now, so there's no turning Bach. (That was a bonus.)

Laurie has a Zoom Happy Hour date with some ladies she used to work with. Laurie was manager and mentor to all of these women at one time or another. She has another role now: friend, and it seems to fit her just fine. The wine flows, and the laughter grows, and the hour is gone in a minute. The real intoxicant here is friendship, not wine. I hope they all come back to that well for another drink sometime soon.



Lord, thank you for old friendships and new technology and the fun that can result when we put them together. Like fine wine, we hope these wonderful friendships improve with age. Amen.

Wednesday

I spend Wednesdays fretting over my Thursday weekly message. I know myself well enough to know that at least twice today I will consider scrapping the whole message and starting over at the 11th hour. What seemed like a brilliant idea last Friday now seems like self-indulgent silliness. I'll think that no one will want to read this, and those who persevere out of a sense of duty won't find anything worthwhile. I'll finally realize that I can't scrap the message and start over because I don't have anything else to say. I'll edit the message for the 47th time, trying to make the language more precise, trying to expose some hidden nugget that will give the message some value.

Around 4 PM I will accept that I wrote the message I had to write, the message that rose unbidden from the images my eyes have captured and the feelings those images gave rise to. I have experienced an incredible sense of duality during this pandemic, and I know that keeps coming through in my messages (especially this one). With apologies to Mr. Dickens, "These are the best of times; these are the worst of times." Horrible things are happening to our community, our nation, and our world as a result of this virus, but beautiful, poignant, and soul restoring things are happening, too. We are isolated from each other, but we find ourselves connected in ways we never imagined.

Having the responsibility to produce a weekly message has led me to experience this moment in time differently than I otherwise would have, and I'm thankful for that. It's time for one more prayer before I hit the send button.

Gentle Jesus, you embody this idea of duality, of concepts that seem oppositional that are really interdependent. You are the king who was born in a manger and arrived at Jerusalem on a donkey. You are the servant leader who washes the feet of your followers. You died to give us life. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. We need to understand and embrace your essential duality in order to make sense of what is happening in our world today. Risen Savior, I pray that the images of My Corona Life will resonate with others and point to you, the thread that holds your isolated people together in this time of trouble. Please hold onto and comfort your people in this community of faith. Amen.

God bless and keep you all.

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