

## REFLECTION FOR THURSDAY SECOND WEEK OF EASTER REFLECTION

There are a lot of tears in the eyes of people around the world as we see this when read newspapers and listen to world news.

There are a lot of tears shared around the world. A lot of people are died at homes, care homes and in hospitals because of covid-19 – Tears

Healthcare workers have brought the virus to their homes, to their families – Tears.

Millions of people around the world have been laid off, lost their jobs – Tears.

I was on the phone the other day with an elderly lady. She is usually a joyful person. But that day her heart was heavy, because she has been in quarantine in her retirement home and she has been stuck in her house, in isolation since the middle of March last year. She desire for human interaction. Her frustration is summarised by one word – quarantine. She said to me I hate the word quarantine.

The word quarantine has a religious and biblical overtone. The word quarantine comes from the Latin word *quadráginta* and it means forty(40).

Readers of the bible knows that the number 40 has a very special significance.

In our biblical tradition, the number 40 from which we get the word quarantine is symbolic of either a time or a place or an experience of some difficult or struggle or cleansing which ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of God and a greater faithfulness to God.

To be quarantine in the bible is to go through something and come out of the experience with clear focus on God and usually having come through the experienced, we carry less baggage so that we can more easily run towards God.

Examples:

+ In the Book of Genesis (Gen 7:12-24) it rains 40 days and 40 nights as God was aware of the sinfulness of humanity in the days of Noah

+In the Book of Exodus (Ex 34:28-33) Moses waited on the top Mount Sinai for 40 days and night for the Word of God to come.

+The people of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years after they committed the sin of idolatry. (Joshua 5:6)

+ In the Gospel, Christ fasted 40 days praying, fasting and wrestling with temptations in the desert (Matt 4:2).

I don't pretend to know in this period of pandemic what God is doing right now in our world. But one of the ways I am trying to open to whatever the Lord is doing right now is this: I am

trying to make the connection between this time of our tears and many times of tears and struggles in the life of ancient Israel.

I am trying to experience these days as true quarantine. I am trying to go through what I will call Corona virus desert. And I am trying to give this Corona virus desert, the time it needs to strip away from me whatever God want to strip away and to teach me the wisdom that can come by living through these days of waiting.

As I mention earlier, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert, his quarantine and there he struggled with temptations. Like Jesus I am struggling with temptations in this corona virus desert. Here is the temptation I am struggling with, I am tempted to focus on the following question:

+ Why is God doing this to us with this virus, with this pandemic? I keep asking myself this question and parishioners keep asking this question.

I am also struggling with another temptation and is this – I want to rush through this experience, I want to get to the end and I want to rush through it so that we can either get back to normal or so that we can figure out the lessons God has taught us so that we can make strategic plans to carry out those lessons into the future.

But do you notice the danger of both temptations? If we focus on rushing or getting through back to normal life, well where is our focus? Is in the past, we are living in the past. And if we are to focus on God's strategic plans for the future, then we are trying to live in the future we cannot know with certainty and that often leads to fear.

When I look at how the people of Israel dealt with destructions and sufferings in their lives, how they dealt with their own quarantine – wandering in the desert for 40 years, Moses on Mount Sinai for 40 days, then a different pattern emerges and it is this pattern that I hope will guide our prayer right now.

There are a lot of reasons for tears in the world right now. And there was a lot of reasons for tears among the people of Israel.

The people of Israel in the midst of their pain and suffering, prophet Isaiah appears (Isaiah chapter 7) and tells the people, the Virgin is with a child and she will give birth to a Son and he shall be name EMMANUEL – a name which means God with us.

Prophet Isaiah did not ask the people to focus on the question "why is God doing this to us?" or "what does the future hold for us?" Instead he told the people to have hope, Emmanuel, God with us right now, in our struggles, in our fears, in our pains, in our tears, in our suffering – God with us. We have to pay attention to what God is doing in us, through us and for us during this period of pandemic.

We should pray for that wisdom right now. We often live in the past or afraid of the future. But in the biblical narratives, God revealed his presence and his truth to the people right in the middle of their suffering. God was with them in the waiting. Israel learned that God is their redeemer.

Moses have to wait 40 days on Mount Sinai to hear from God. Mary of Magdala and others could not have rush immediately from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. First , they have to live through Holy Saturday, a day of silent, waiting and trusting.

If we are honest, we all want to get back to normal life but the bible tells us that first and foremost, we must live this current experience of quarantine, this time of biblical 40, this time of tears. We cannot rush it. God is present, God is with us.

This pandemic experience has taken away certain idols of us, it has taken away certain structures of security we used to hold on to.

The questions becomes: Can I trust and wait, paying attention to however and whatever the living God is revealing himself as Emmanuel – God with us.

I would like us to reflect on these four questions:

1. What tears have you experience during this quarantine?
2. What tears do you see in people around you?
3. How have you experience Emmanuel – God with us during this pandemic?
4. What helps you to be patient, understanding, caring, and loving?

There is one thing I ask of the Lord, for this I long, to live in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life.

I am sure I shall see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Hope in the Lord, hold firm, take heart, hope in the Lord.

Fr Patrick