

It seems Christ is often revealed to me in my interaction/relationships with other people. Due to social distancing and the stay at home mandate this has proven somewhat limiting. However, these days have had the effect of opening my spiritual awareness to more opportunity.

As I have been outdoors, I have taken opportunity to intentionally take note of the beauty of creation. I can see Christ in the clouds floating in the sky and in the earth that filters through my hands. I have encountered the Lord in prayer, in phone conversations, some e-mails and live stream worship. It is a matter of great peace & joy that there have been times of presence, in unexpected places. We come to know Christ and grow in that love through a variety of experiences.

Another opportunity came while cleaning out closets and going through old letters & keepsakes of times long forgotten. Reading through them brought back memories of special people and places that have impacted my life.

In spiritual circles, life has been likened to a journey! Sometimes it seems all is well and life is good as the saying goes, sometimes not so much. The challenge these days seems to be keeping our faith & hope focused on the goodness of life while living through what seems so unreal, threatening & even dangerous.

Quoting the Grateful Dead, "What a long strange trip this has been." It has been strange, but I sense we are coming to a crossroads where present reality awaits & a lot of impactful decisions will need to be made.

It is time to literally regroup, reflect on next steps, & most of all spend some time renewing our collective energy for what might lie ahead. We are still dealing with a future that is largely unknown, but with the conversations now turning to re-opening/re-gathering we are going to have to re-focus and seek out what path is best for all concerned.

Beloved, please know that this has not been idle time - a good bit of energy has been allotted toward discerning what our common future might look like. Our Bishop has researched best practices from reliable sources and is ready to share those ideas with the diocese. We will be hearing about these plans allowing us to gather in person soon. So, I ask for your patience and understanding!

I know that many of you are anxious and yes, you have reason to be, this virus is not something to play around with. While this time has seemed like a period of exile, I hope that you have also found it to be a time to reflect on your life and your place/vocation in the world. We all need time to renew and heal, - recreate ourselves, and find joy in that life-giving spirit that sustains and strengthens us for all good things. It is not too late, to use this time to re-create yourself and allow God's life-giving spirit to enter and bring you the peace and joy that surpasses all understanding.

As concerns Saint Francis as a whole, these days have been a time of testing. We have been stretched, molded, and made over. We have had to step out in faith a bit and reconfigure our lives, while seeking ways to better serve each other in the church and in the community. It **has not** been especially easy for any of us. Yet I know we are better for it because we have experienced growth in Christ's love; this is what we will rely on in the days ahead.

Even so, we run the risk of coming undone & losing resolve. So, I urge you to try to see where Christ has been alive in your life. Perhaps look for some closure on some things that need to be closed so that you can move ahead with life.

I spoke earlier about going through some old memories. I share this one because it came at a time when my family was being re-created after a long journey.

Coming on the heels of Mother's Day, I share part of a letter from my mother that I believe is one of those occasions of the Holy Spirit speaking to us through those we love. She wrote this shortly before my ordination to the priesthood, which was May 9, 1998. As thoughts of the need for some closure to certain things in my life swirled in my head, I read these words from my mother: -

"Dear ones, My heart is still celebrating for all of you - for us- in fact for everybody known and those yet to be known. An end for a beginning." She continues, "I think, I'm thinking there is some sort of closure on the past few years which is a satisfying feeling. And I think, I think this feeling I have of excitement and anticipation is also a good and satisfying feeling. I know while you are making Him known in all times and all places his Spirit will be with you giving you strength, courage and guidance. God will sustain you in all that you do."

I know, my mother speaks to all of us. You know, often our relationship to God is manifested as faith and hope. Yet in the Gospel reading for the day, Jesus is pressing the question, "Do you love me?" God is love and all relationships derived from that understanding are characterized as love.

As far as the disciples are concerned, love is formed and sealed by the word Christ spoke to them and holding to that word is evidence of that love. It is the same for us!

Sometimes we just need to be reminded of the facts. God is love and will never leave us abandoned. I thank my mother for reminding me of where the strength to believe this comes from. In all things I am refreshed and encouraged in this God of love, who fills us with joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the end the gospel assures us that peace and joy are appropriate to the events of our Lord's self sacrifice. Jesus' arrest and death are not a triumph of the world but rather the operation of God's presence in all things and the confirmation of God's love for us.

The peace given is the knowledge that God is God, that God loves the world, that God is with us and loves us, and that God makes that love real in heroic acts of self-offering.

Beloved something new is being born in us & around us!

Now is not the time to lose hope - rather have courage, renew your commitments to love, keep each other in prayer and believe that in the end all will be well. (This is God's promise and the hope that is in us.)