Solitude, Solidarity and Social Distancing

The lockdown and restrictions in various cities and countries have unearthed an unshakeable restlessness. Closure of schools, universities, offices and businesses have left many struggling with what would seem to be some kind of void. Somehow this crisis questions the authenticity of our relationships and bonds. Can our human community and social structures endure our current separations? Have our occupations just been distractions, preventing us from getting to know ourselves and from identifying with each other? However, it may be an opportunity to confront the reality of social distancing by engaging solitude and solidarity.

Social distancing has served to protect many from the spread of the COVID-19 virus. However, there are many who relish the thought of not having to be ‘touchy feely.’ Has social distancing allowed us to perpetuate our prejudices or preferences? Is social distancing a polite way to mask the fact that we may have been suffering from emotional distancing? We may miss our gatherings, but can we say, we had very strong bonds and connections with each other in the first place? Is it accurate enough to claim that we really miss our classmates, co-workers, and Church brothers and sisters? Social distancing is an unselfish investment to safeguard our friends, family and fellow human beings. However, it is not meant to legitimize our emotional disconnection from others.

Solitude is space that many of us flee. The state of seclusion and remoteness is unfrequented by us. Spending time in solitude can be scary. Nonetheless, being in solitude can also be sacred. It can be uncomfortable, because we are led to go deeper in self-discovery and self-intimacy. When we are able to be intimate with ourselves, then we can confidently reach out to others in intimacy without simultaneously pushing them away. Maybe we should use this time of solitude to stop hiding from ourselves, we should see it as an occasion to explore our interior. Solitude can provide a space for inner peace and it is fertile ground for a sacred encounter within. Can we discover God in the temple of our soul? Can we go deeper in our secret place of prayer? It is from the core of our deepest selves that we can not only find peace, but offer it to others.

There is a two-fold journey towards transcending social distancing. Firstly, enjoying the solace of solitude as an interior shrine that is both a summit and the deep. Where a person surrenders to the sacred union with God and self. Secondly, engrossing ourselves in the universal solidarity of humanity to survive. Our concern for well-being of others surpasses our distinctions, whether they are religious, immigational, ethnic, national or even continental. Our solidarity has arisen from our shared suffering! We are all desperate for relief from the affliction of this virus, which means there is a global fellowship arising from our common responsibilities and interests. It is the synergy of our solitude and spiritual solidarity that stimulates our sacred stand against the effects of social distancing and soothes our emotional disassociations. We can satiate our longing for companionship by being disposed to solitude and solidarity. Solitude and solidarity help us to intimate with God, self and others.