

My dear people,

So many of you have expressed gratitude for communications from Stella Maris that I must apologize if I have let you down by not writing one of these columns since before Easter. In my mind, I actually wrote several columns for the Sacred Triduum and Easter. Quite honestly, I cannot tell you why the columns were never physically written and sent out to you. On the one hand, with everything shut down during this pandemic, one would think there would be plenty of time to write a column. In reality, I understand neither where each day goes nor why everybody is so tired. Certainly, among my priest friends there are frequent complaints of exhaustion, but why? As one said, it would be easier to operate the parish from the office than over the internet. Instead of the usual eight Masses offered for Easter, I celebrated two and was quite tired when it was all over. Why? Early on in the pandemic, I did write about anxiety as the fear of the unknown. Although we have had time to adjust to the enforced shutdown and even though we know what life is like with churches and so many businesses closed, we are still anxious. We are anxious regarding the lives and health of loved ones, our own health, the worldwide economy, the unemployed, those who lead us, and the still unknown future. It is draining.

In the way of news, I received official word about what we all have figured out: the administration of Confirmation (set for May 5) is postponed indefinitely. Likewise, First Holy Communion, scheduled for May 9 must also be postponed indefinitely. When the day comes to re-schedule, I will try to give sufficient advance notice in case there are grandparents, godparents or others who may wish to get better rates on airline tickets. I was surprised and relieved to hear that churches can apply for loans under the PPP Act and have made application through the services being provided by the Diocese. These loans will be forgiven if we do not lay off employees because of the pandemic. While, we have not yet been certified to get help with our payroll (for a specified number of pay periods only) I am encouraged. Likewise, your faithfulness in getting your donations in is highly encouraging. On the parish website you can find access to our new portal for electronic giving.

Through various contacts with people, I hear there is a lot of cleaning going on both inside homes and out in the yards. I have done my share, but not nearly as much as I thought might be accomplished in this length of time. I've had my lighter moments and some deeper emotions as well. As these times make us all more mindful of our mortality, I have been trying to show consideration for the Executor of my estate. When a family has a homestead for four generations over 115 years, items do tend to accumulate. If some members of that family have a certain abhorrence for trash cans and wastepaper baskets, the problem is worse. In the early days of the shutdown, I made spare time productive by going through years of household records, receipts, letters, Christmas cards and newspaper clippings. It was interesting to see the log of who placed long distance telephone calls to the city and whether they owed the household accounts ten or fifteen cents per call. Water

bills under \$3.00 were likewise interesting. Letter after letter simply could not all be read, but references to the shortages during WWII, the hopes for peace and post cards (one cent postage) with descriptions of the ferry ride back to the city and perhaps thanks for an enjoyable day at the beach, were informative and entertaining, but there comes a time to bag it all up and throw it away.

Among the many newspaper clippings, some were worth saving. Most should have gone in the trash long ago. There was a small collection of the "Victor Record Review" from the late 1930's. I put them aside to give to a collector of 78 rpm records when I made the mistake of opening one (Vol. 2, No. 3, September of 1939) and lo and behold the first article was "Music For What Ails You." Before passing the magazine along, I wanted to share some thoughts in it pertinent to our troubled and confusing times.

The article begins: *Next time you come home after a hard day, dog tired, tense, murder in your eye, try this. Stretch out full length, close your eyes and have someone put on that record of the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria" (Victor No. 6599). Let it soak in. After the fourth repetition, if your body is not relaxed and your mind given less to thoughts of mayhem, I'm no doctor of music therapy.* The day after I read that, I had a huge smile on my face as I received a note from a parishioner with a generous tithe and a note. Referring to the difficulties of these times, he wrote that every day he and his wife listened to the *Ave Maria* for comfort. Wow! I thought: 'we talk about the permanence of beauty; here we are living it.'

As everyone seeks comfort in uncertainty, music can certainly be a help. The article mentioned David playing his harp for Saul: "Whenever the spirit from Bod troubled Saul, David took the harp and played; then Saul grew calm and recovered and the evil spirit left him." (I Samuel: 16:23) Hippocrates, it is said, treated his patients with music as far back as 400 B.C. Writing in 1939, the author noted that recorded music was a technique being used in hospitals and mental institutions (remember those?). Further, the vibrations from music were touted as affecting the body including the effect of rhythm on the heart. "Fast rhythms raise your pulse, respiration and blood pressure; slow rhythms lower these factors." Hence, music could be used as a stimulant and a sedative with no bad after-effects. To advance the point (and boost record sales) the article cited a Carnegie Institute of Technology study of 20,000 people which found that certain pieces of music were capable of changing undesirable moods to more desirable ones.

"Ave Maria," it said, *actually saved a young woman recently from nervous breakdown. The doctor in charge played it until its soothing strains soaked into her subconscious; she wilted from her high nervous tension and slept for the first time in days. This piece is prescribed for cases of hysteria.*

While we might smile at the sales pitch and the "science" of 1939, we do know the effect that music can have on the spirit. Today, we tend to speak in terms of endorphin release. The article reminded me of something once noted

about the classic spiritual works such as Adolphe Tanquerey's *The Spiritual Life* from the early 1900's. Written before the advent of Psychology, the works often dealt with behaviors and emotions not yet studied scientifically, but observed nonetheless. If you are interested in suggestions from 1939, I'll share a few. For morning pick-me-ups Victor records suggested something like the Toreador Song. To chase away worries and troubles: Moonlight Sonata. When tense and nervous: *Ave Maria*, or the Meditation from Thais (a truly lovely work). If one is longing, try "Home on the Range" or "Danny Boy". "Star Dust" is recommended to keep you in love. If your courage is faltering, buy the march from Tanhauser, the Ride of the Valkyries, Abide with Me, or Bolero. "When You're Sunk" Victor recommends "Steal Away" or "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin." Don't be too quick to smile. Recently a parishioner emailed me that he was surviving listening to "Willie's Roadhouse", the classic country music station on Sirius XM. In another coincidence, I told him I'd been listening to it all day.

My amateur opinion is that whatever the science behind music might be, the music that we absorbed during the formative years of the brain (around adolescence especially) makes a long term imprint. At least that's why I think Classic Country Western and Beach Music speak to me. Somewhere in adolescence, I must have heard the Big Bands as well. And as for Classical Music, well it's classic.

The importance of a daily routine or schedule is important in these strange times. I know I have written this to you before, but I repeat myself because I need to be reminded. Speaking of strange times, how can the days be so long and the weeks be so short?

I must confess feeling some guilt about having access to the Eucharist when you do not. You must be starving for Holy Communion. The day will come when we can celebrate together again. I do believe we shall be much more grateful for union with the Lord and each other. As best I am able, I celebrate Mass privately and remember your intentions, your protection from this pestilence and your spiritual and emotional health.

Father McInerny

